
GEELONG

Ice users are dying on drug rehabilitation waiting lists, amid a statewide backlog for key services

Ice users are dying while languishing on waiting lists to access residential rehabilitation services, amid a surging demand for alcohol and drug services driven by the killer drug, a key provider has revealed

Harrison Tippet, Geelong Advertiser

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ICE users are dying while languishing on waiting lists to access residential rehabilitation services in the region amid a ballooning demand for alcohol and drug services driven by the killer drug, a key provider has revealed.

And, the state's peak body for alcohol and drug services has voiced concerns about the huge backlog of about 2500 people waiting to access help for their addiction in Victoria, where the system is "grinding under the weight of the impact of COVID".

Geelong's most accessible residential rehabilitation service, Mount Duneed not-for-profit Foundation 61, has revealed up to two people are dying per week as they wait for an available bed.

Program Director Rob Lytzki revealed the harrowing toll of Geelong's lack of affordable rehab services.

"Our waiting list is at six to 12 months... somewhere above 50 or 60 people are waiting," Mr Lytzki told the Geelong Advertiser.

"We've still got people dying on the waiting list.

"Recently we rang two people in a week that were dead. It's regular enough."

Mr Lytzki estimated the state's waiting list for alcohol and drug services was close to 5000 people, and had been largely impacted by the rise of crystal

methamphetamines and the financial burden of private rehabs charging up to \$30,000 per month.

“Better than 90 per cent of all our applications are ‘icies’, nowadays,” he said. “It used to be a standard old blend of about a third... your alchies, and your grassheads and your heroin heads and stuff like that, now just about all of them go through the mill for a year or two and end up on ice.

“Ice is starting to destroy the whole social fabric of the place... Everything is five or ten fold, the violence and the crime.”

Foundation 61 resident Jamie Charles, 46, was accepted into the rehab in November, following a six-month hunt for a bed in Victoria.

“I tried the one in Geelong, it was full, Ballarat was full, and my drug counsellor got this number and I rang these guys up and for about four months. I was ringing every week trying to get in,” he said.

“There are so many people like us out there that want help, but everywhere is full. When I first started looking, because I had to wait so long, I just kept using the drugs because I couldn’t get in anywhere. I just thought ‘f--- it’ sort of thing. You feel there’s no hope so you just continue using.”

Sam Biondo, the executive officer of peak body Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, said access to treatment for drug and alcohol addiction was “critically important”.

“Access to treatment in a timely manner is really important,” Mr Biondo said. “There’s currently about 2500 people on our waiting list to get access to treatment in Victoria.”

“The system is sort of grinding under the weight of the impact of COVID. Suppressed demand during that period is starting to float to the surface, as well as waiting lists brought about by social distancing and abnormal access to services.

“[Ice] is a complex substance that has an enormous toll on the individual, loved ones around them and the community. There’s no doubt about the broader impacts for people that find themselves in trouble with the substance.”

Barwon Health mental health, alcohol and drugs services clinical director Associate Professor Steve Moylan said methamphetamine use was a “concern” in the community

Professor Moylan revealed referrals for assistance with drug and alcohol problems increased by nine per cent across 2020, while a “more significant increase” in the final quarter of 2020 saw a 22 per cent rise on the final quarter of 2019.

Barwon Health did not say what proportion of this demand related to methamphetamine.

