



## MEDIA RELEASE

### **New campaign challenges perceptions about overdose deaths**

Ballarat residents are being urged to rethink their perceptions about overdose deaths.

In the lead up to International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) on August 31, Ballarat Community Health (BCH) is warning about the often-ignored risks of poly substance use and the frequency of overdose deaths in rural areas.

BCH Harm Reduction Coordinator Kate Davenport said people often dismissed opioid overdose as a metropolitan or young person's problem.

"It could be anybody anywhere," Ms Davenport said. "We need to challenge people's ideas about who experiences an overdose. We often think of overdose as a young person's problem when in fact, the majority of people dying as a result of overdose are in the 35-65 age range," she added.

The most recent Coroner's Court of Victoria report shows there were 1031 overdose deaths in Victoria between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2022. More than 20 per cent of overdose deaths were in regional Victoria and about 75 per cent were unintentional.

The risks associated with poly substance use – the combination of multiple drugs – are also often ignored.

On average, 75 per cent of Victorian overdose deaths involve multiple drugs and pharmaceutical drugs played a role in three-quarters of all deaths. "One substance may not be enough to cause an overdose, but a combination could be fatal," Ms Davenport said.

Ms Davenport said Ballarat Community Health was well placed to support people to avoid overdose.

The BCH campaign will culminate with a free movie screening on August 31 at 6.15pm at the Regent Cinemas Ballarat of *The Fix*, an adaptation of the book *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs* by Johann Hari.

Narrated by Samuel L. Jackson, *The Fix* aims to expose the history of the war on drugs in the U.S, examine its worldwide impact and debunk common misunderstandings about drugs and addiction.

After the film there will be a panel discussion featuring harm reduction practitioner Simon Brisbane, addiction medicine physician Dr Adam Straub and with people with lived experience. Tickets can be obtained at <https://www.trybooking.com/CIPWY>

As part of the campaign, the Ballarat Town Hall clock face, and Lake Wendouree and Eureka Gardens fountains will be lit up in purple– the colour of IOAD – on August 31.

The 2023 theme for International Overdose Awareness Day is Recognising Those People Who Go Unseen, which is about acknowledging people in our communities who are affected by overdose but might go unseen in the crisis.

Ms Davenport is available for Overdose Prevention Education to people at risk of overdose and their families and can be contacted on 5338 4500.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

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