

# Alcohol & Other Drugs

GETTING STARTED

4

# This is Booklet 4 in the Getting Started Series.

Getting Started is a guide  
for people leaving prison.

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This Booklet was last updated in September 2010. If any information has changed or you notice an error please contact Corrections Victoria on (03) 8684 6600 or email: [corrections@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:corrections@justice.vic.gov.au)

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## Drugs & Alcohol

Many people leave prison thinking that they can stay clean. But, it can be harder than you expect when you get out.

Life can be very stressful after release. If you don't have ways of coping, it can be hard work staying clean.

If you want to avoid or control your drug or alcohol use you need a realistic support plan. The plan needs to be in place **before** your release.

If you take medication to control drug use, speak to the Prison Health Service about a release plan.

Remember, there are people and services out there that can help you.

## Drug use after prison

Settling back into life after prison is tough, but it can be made worse by using or drinking heavily.

- Physical health can suffer (including the risk of catching blood-borne viruses, such as Hep C or HIV, from injecting)
- Mental health issues can be made worse, or sometimes caused by heavy use
- Relationships can suffer
- Housing and employment are harder to find and to keep

## Overdoses

Overdoses are very common after prison. A quarter of people who die from overdoses in Victoria are ex-prisoners.

Your tolerance to drugs will be much lower than it was when you were using regularly.

Although some people use in prison, it is probably not as much as they use outside. When you get out, the gear may also be stronger than you are used to.

## Risk of Relapse

It's important to realise things may change for you on the outside. Even if you plan to stay clean, relapses can occur.

Common triggers for relapse include:

- Meeting old friends or dealers in the drug scene
- Hanging around areas where you previously used
- Feeling bored, frustrated, angry, anxious, sad or stressed
- Getting into fights with partners, friends or family

## Legal risks

### **Recent changes in policing**

- Police now have powers to stop and search people without a reason
- Random drug and alcohol testing of drivers has increased – and the penalties are even harsher

## Parole and Drug / Alcohol Use

If your Parole Order states that you must abstain from drugs or alcohol it means you cannot use any amount. You will have to take regular drug tests (usually urine tests). Low levels of drugs will show up in your urine. They can tell the difference between methadone and heroin.

CCOs (Parole Officers) are also very quick to spot signs that someone is using. If you are caught out, your Parole could be cancelled and you may end up back in prison.

You need to be alert for your CCO appointments. Organise them for a time when you will be awake and on the ball and take into account your sleeping pattern, drug and alcohol use, medication and work hours.

## Strategies for coping with D&A issues

It is important to have strategies in place **before** leaving prison. If you wait until you are released then you may have to wait a week or two for an appointment with a Drug or Alcohol support program or agency. A lot can happen in your first couple of weeks on the outside.

## Pharmacotherapy or OSTP

Pharmacotherapy is treatment with a prescribed drug that is similar to the illegal drug. It is also known as **Drug or Alcohol Replacement Therapy** or **Opiate Substitution Therapy Program** (OSTP). Methadone is a well known example but there are other ones.

If you are already on an OSTP, talk to the Prison Health Staff at least 3-4 weeks before your release. Ask them how you can continue your treatment on the outside.

*The Release Pharmacotherapy Dispensing Subsidy Program is available to people on the OSTP in prison.*

*The Department of Justice pays for treatment for your first 4 weeks after you get out.*

If you have any problems when you get out ask your pharmacist to call **Justice Health** on **(03) 9947 1601**

Ask the Prison Health Staff to find you a local doctor and pharmacist. They can also arrange an appointment for when you are released.

Not all doctors and pharmacies deal with methadone so you may need to travel.

**Before your release** arrange all relevant documentation including:

- Your discharge summary
- A letter from the prison health provider addressed to the community prescriber, outlining your progress on the Program and the current dose
- A prescription from the doctor for methadone or buprenorphine to last until your community appointment
- Fax prescription through to the nominated chemist

*If you don't have your post prison treatment organised within 24 hours of your release, talk to the Prison Health Service.*

**On the day of release** you should receive enough medication to last at least 3 days (longer if released before a weekend or public holiday).

If you miss doses or make trouble at the Pharmacy, they can kick you off the program.

There are 4 specialist pharmacotherapy services located across Melbourne. These services will work with you if are having trouble finding a GP. For more information contact **Directline**, **1800 888 236**

### **Post-Release Services:**

If you have drug and alcohol conditions on your Parole Order, the CCO will organise an ACSO COATS assessment. COATS (Community Offenders Advice and Treatment Service) will assess you and purchase treatment for you in the community. The assessment will take place in prison or you will need to see them shortly after you are released.

If you are on straight release, ACSO also has the StepOut Program. StepOut is an intensive post-prison drug treatment service.

Always check with support services about confidentiality. You will have to sign a release of information form for Parole but not everything needs to be reported back. Ask them what they will pass on and what they will keep private.

There are many Drug and Alcohol Services in the community but most will have waiting times.

### Community Support Services

To get a referral or information about local Drug & Alcohol services contact **Directline**, **1800 888 236**

Some of the options are:

### Residential Rehabilitation programs

Residential drug rehab programs can be useful if you lose control of your drug use and need 24 hour support. They provide a roof over your head and treatment for drug or alcohol

dependence. However, you need to be serious about staying clean. Most residential rehab programs will kick you out if you use.

### **Withdrawal (detox) programs**

It's usually quicker to get into a non-residential detox program than a residential one. The wait can still be a week or more. There are different ways to detox, some easier and slower, some quicker but more difficult.

### **NA (Narcotics Anonymous) and AA (Alcoholics Anonymous)**

NA and AA meetings can help you cope with the temptation to drink or use. They work better if you go regularly and find a good meeting.

NA and AA meetings are based on the 12-step model. This means you have to admit you are an alcoholic or a drug addict and be committed to abstinence (not drinking or using at all). You can still go to meetings if you relapse, but you must aim to give up altogether.

## Drug and Alcohol Counselling

Seeing a D&A Counsellor regularly can be a really good idea. Even when you feel you're coping, a counsellor can help you stay focused.

D&A counselling can help with:

- Support
- Motivation
- Working out a safety plan
- Understanding your drug use patterns
- Developing relapse prevention strategies

D&A counsellors do not:

- Tell you not to use drugs
- Judge you if you stuff up

They understand most people need a few chances to stay clean.

## Harm Reduction Techniques

If you do start to use again you should try to limit the danger to yourself and others.

Harm reduction techniques can help to reduce the risk of overdose or other negative effects.

Some important strategies:

- Avoid mixing drugs
- Use clean, sterile equipment
- Do not share **any** of your equipment
- Only buy from someone you know
- Use in a safe place with people you trust
- If you haven't used for a while make sure you start with a small dose – it doesn't take long for your tolerance levels to go down
- Don't use on your own (in case you overdose)

If it's new gear, you are alone or have recently taken other drugs, then halve your dose.

Make sure you and those around you know what to do in the event of an overdose. You can do a first aid course in prison so you can respond better if needed.

### Signs of Heroin Overdose

An overdose can come on suddenly or develop slowly. Just because someone doesn't drop immediately it doesn't mean they didn't overdose.

The person may go in and out of unconsciousness several times. The reason people die from overdoses is because they stop breathing.

There are many things to remember and signs to look for. Common signs of overdosing include some or all of the following:

- Not responding when spoken to
- Blue lips and fingernails
- Convulsions
- Cold, clammy skin
- Snoring or gurgling sounds

### What to do in the event of an overdose

A quick response can save lives. If you think someone has overdosed, talk to them and try to get them to respond.

If they don't respond call **000** and ask for an ambulance immediately. You don't need credit on your mobile to call **000**. If you have no network coverage your phone will display what number to use.

### Remember these steps:

- 1 Call 000**
- 2** Stay with the person until the ambulance arrives
- 3** Ensure they have enough air, keep crowds back, open windows and loosen tight clothing
- 4** If the person is unconscious, turn them on their side to prevent choking
- 5** If they are not breathing, give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and if there is no pulse, apply CPR (the ambulance workers can instruct you over the phone)
- 6** Provide the ambulance officers with as much information as you can: how much heroin was taken, how long ago and if any other drugs or alcohol were taken.
- 7** Ambulance officers are not obliged to involve the Police but they may if the overdose results in death or if they feel threatened or at risk.

## Harm Reduction when Injecting

Sharing injecting equipment puts you at risk from blood-borne viruses such as Hepatitis B and C and HIV. Injecting equipment includes the needle, syringe, swab, tourniquet, spoon and filter.

To help prevent the spread of infection:

- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after injecting
- Make sure all your equipment is new and sterile (swabs, water, spoon, tourniquet, filter and fit)
- Don't share any part of your equipment, even a tourniquet
- If new, sterile equipment is impossible, at least make sure your equipment is as clean as possible
- Use sterile alcohol swabs to clean the spoon and the injecting area
- Clean up any blood with a tissue and soapy water
- Throw away old swabs and filters – don't reuse them

- Always dispose of your used fit in a ‘sharps’ disposal bin – it’s best to rinse your fit in clean water after you use it

## Cleaning fits

You should always use a new fit. There is no completely safe way to clean a used syringe. However, if you are going to share a needle, you should clean it as follows:

- 1** Draw clean water up into your syringe and flush it out again. Repeat until no trace of blood is visible. Use fresh water each time.
- 2** Take the syringe apart and soak in a container of full strength bleach for at least two minutes. If you can’t soak it, fill it with bleach and shake it for at least 30 seconds (count slowly), then flush it out again. Repeat this at least once.
- 3** Re-fill the syringe with clean water and flush out again to rinse the bleach out of the syringe. Repeat this flushing procedure at least six times.

If you don't have bleach, at the very least follow the above procedure using soapy water. This won't kill everything, but it is better than nothing. Remember that even bleach is not guaranteed to eliminate the risk of infection.

*Needle and Syringe Programs can provide clean kits, as well as information and education about how to inject safely. For your nearest NSP call the Syringe Disposal Helpline on 1800 552 355 (24 hours).*

### Other dangers

Even with new syringes, if you don't inject properly you place yourself at risk of bruising, 'dirty hits', blood poisoning or abscesses (collections of pus under the skin).

To reduce harm to your body:

- Alternate your injecting sites to avoid damaging your veins
- Injecting into the wrong place can be extremely dangerous (especially in the groin or neck)

- Don't use cigarette filters to filter your drugs and don't inject pills or the contents of gel caps – these can all damage your veins and heart

The above are only some basic tips. You should speak to a **Needle and Syringe Program** worker about the safest methods.

**Syringe Helpline 1800 552 355**

### Drug and Alcohol Services

These services provide general info and advice as well as crisis support. If they can't help you they will tell you who can.

**Directline 1800 888 236**

Directline provides a free, confidential, and anonymous round-the-clock counselling, information & referral line. Services include:

- Immediate counselling & support, including crisis intervention
- Support in dealing with the impact of drug use on the family

- Assistance in developing strategies to deal with alcohol or drug problems
- Information about how to reduce the harm associated with drug use, including details of local Needle Syringe Programs
- Referrals to relevant support services throughout Victoria, including OSTPs, rehab, support and counselling services

### **Syringe Helpline: 1800 552 355**

Provides information on needle and syringe programs throughout Victoria.

### **VIVAIDS 9329 1500**

Information and education to current injecting drug users (IDU), ex IDU and carers.

### **Smoking Quitline 13 78 48 or (03) 9635 5588**

Gives advice to help people stop smoking.

### **Narcotics Anonymous (03) 9525 2833**

Call them to find your nearest group meeting

**Alcoholics Anonymous (03) 9429 1833**

Call them to find your nearest group meeting

**Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS)****1800 014 446**

Drug and alcohol services for people aged between 12 and 21.

Call 1800 123 234 for drug information in other languages

**Support for Families and Friends:****Family Drug Line 1300 660 068**

They offer support, information and referrals for people who have a loved one that is misusing drugs or alcohol.

They are available Monday to Friday, from 9am to 9pm.

**Al Anon and AlaTeen (03) 9620 2166**

Al Anon is a form of group support for relatives and friends of alcoholics.

AlaTeen is for young people who have been affected by someone else's drinking.

Call them to find your local support group.

**Other Supports:****Lifeline 13 11 14**

Counsellors are available 24 hours a day to talk to you about any issues that you have.

**Hepatitis C Council of Victoria**

**1800 703 003 or (03) 9380 4644**

Information, counselling and support for those affected by Hepatitis C.

**Connect Line – HIV and Sexual Health**

**1800 038 125**

Information, counselling, referral and support for sexual health concerns.

