

News

Geelong Advertiser

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Geelong rehab services struggling to cope with ice epidemic

- by: Anthea Cannon
- From: Geelong Advertiser
- January 13, 2014 3:35PM

MORE drug rehabilitation beds are needed in Geelong as the ice epidemic forces desperate families to turn to the private sector for help, agencies have said.

Melbourne private rehab program DayHab chief executive Mick Hall said the company had decided to trial a new mobile program in Geelong next month in response to a "significant spike" in inquiries from locals.

He said the two-week program would gauge demand with a plan to continue the program and establish long term after-care if there's a need.

Five of the 15 places are already full.

"We know people who are trying to access help are struggling with fairly lengthy waiting lists," Mr Hall said.

"There's a small window of opportunity when people are willing to accept help and if there are financial or time barriers they might wait until the next crisis."

Youth Support and Advocacy Service services director Peter Wearne said they were "really, really busy" with their drug rehabilitation services.

He said those seeking help in Geelong had access to all Victorian public rehabilitation beds with applicants assessed based on risk and need, though the region's demand more than filled Geelong's four drug rehabilitation beds for 12 to 21-year-olds.

"We never had a bed not allocated. Demand is always high and we're solidly booked until the end of March, mid April," Mr Wearne said.

"We've seen a threefold increase in the past 18 months to two years with people nominating ice as their drug of most concern.

"Alcohol and cannabis are the most used but ice is running a close third and that's been the massive change."

Mr Wearne said YSAS had campaigned strongly to the State Government for more funding for residential rehabilitation services and was hopeful the current parliamentary inquiry into ice would deliver more resources, especially in regional areas.

He said ice withdrawal and rehabilitation were clogging the system because of the lengthy recovery time compared to other drugs.

"For those on heroin, after a week (of being clean), they're pretty much physically okay. On ice it takes six to eight weeks to really physically recover," Mr Wearne said.

"It drains and disrupts normal brain function and it takes a long time to get physical stability."

A spokesman for Mental Health Minister Mary Wooldridge said the government was undertaking significant reform of alcohol and drug treatment to improve access, effectiveness and help save lives.

"The Coalition is investing in the expansion alcohol and drug treatment services, has doubled the investment in pharmacotherapy and is exploring other strategies to minimise the harm caused by alcohol misuse and drug use," the spokesman said.

"The Coalition Government has also released Victoria's first whole-of-government strategy to reduce the impact of alcohol and drug abuse in the community, as well as initiating the current parliamentary inquiry into methamphetamines."

The Parliamentary Inquiry into the Supply and Use of Methamphetamines, which heard evidence from Geelong in October, will return its recommendations by August 31.

Whether public or private, both Mr Hall and Mr Wearne urged anyone concerned about a friend or family member to seek help.

"Seek help straight away, there is help and young people do recover," Mr Wearne said.

"People think they can sort it out themselves, that with love they'll be okay but they need professional help," Mr Hall said.

DayHab will host a free drug, alcohol and gambling addiction information evening at Simmonds Stadium on January 28, with guest speaker David Schwarz.

For help phone YSAS's 24-hour hotline 1800 014 446 or ring Barwon Health's mental health, drug and alcohol 24-hour line on 1300 094 187.

What to look for -

- mood swings
 - increased aggression
 - paranoia
 - not sleeping
 - not eating properly
 - erratic thinking
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