

Your Ref: 2019/00386164

Our Ref: COR23/6

The Hon. Michael Daley, MP
Attorney General
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Coronial inquest into the death of Bradley Hope

Dear Attorney General

Michael.

I write in relation to the findings and recommendations made on 3 March 2023 by State Coroner Teresa O'Sullivan regarding the death of Bradley Hope.

Bradley Hope died at the Tweed Hospital on 8 December 2019 as a consequence of complications associated with volatile substance use. Bradley's cause of death was cardiac arrhythmia or hypoxia in the setting of hydrocarbon inhalation. His death was accidental. He was 16 years of age.

Magistrate O'Sullivan described Bradley as 'a sparkling, charismatic and loving young man, with a bright future'. In relation to the delay in contacting emergency services, the State Coroner did not consider that earlier intervention in Bradley's case would have led to a different outcome. The coronial findings detailed the complexity of addressing the issue of volatile substance use (VSU), that is, the deliberate inhalation of substances that produce a vapour or gas at room temperature.

The State Coroner made 5 recommendations in total. She directed 2 recommendations to the Aerosol Association of Australia. Magistrate O'Sullivan directed the 3 following recommendations to NSW Health, which are all supported.

Recommendation 1

The State Coroner recommended:

- a. That the NSW Ministry of Health convene a 'round-table' forum with stakeholders in NSW in relation to the issue of Volatile Substance Use (VSU) in NSW, including as to the misuse of aerosol deodorants and also 'nangs', informed by the approach adopted by the 'Inhalants Roundtable' convened by the Queensland Government, and chaired by the QLD Chief Health Officer in December 2019 (NSW VSU Roundtable).

Recommendation 2

The State Coroner recommended:

- b. That the NSW VSU Roundtable participants – in addition to the Department of Health - include relevant stakeholders such as:
 - i. the NSW Police Force;
 - ii. the NSW Department of Education;
 - iii. the NSW Education Standards Authority;
 - iv. the NSW Ambulance Service;
 - v. the NSW Department of Communities & Justice;
 - vi. industry participants, including the Aerosol Association of Australia and Unilever Australia Limited;
 - vii. all major retailers of aerosols (including Coles, Woolworths and pharmacies);
 - viii. the retail associations (including the National Retail Association and the Australian Retailers Association);
 - ix. Community youth and AOD services (including NGOs);
 - x. First Nations health agencies;
 - xi. an advisory expert panel (including academics in the VSU field);
 - xii. any other organisations or individuals of relevance.

Recommendation 3

The State Coroner recommended:

- c. That key themes of the NSW VSU Roundtable include consideration of:
 - i. Prioritising the collation of data across agencies in NSW to obtain better statistical evidence relating to VSU use in NSW (including the use of aerosols and 'nangs'), including as to the prevalence of VSU in NSW;
 - 1. data trends in VSU within NSW;
 - 2. potential 'hotspots' within NSW; and
 - 3. mortality (deaths) and morbidity (harms) associated with VSU within NSW.
 - ii. A review of the NSW Police Force P79A Form with respect to capturing sufficient information which may indicate the need for specific toxicity testing;
 - iii. Arrangements and channels of communication for sharing such data between agencies and stakeholders (including at a national level) so as to better monitor, respond to and report upon, VSU (including outbreaks or 'hotspots');
 - iv. Ensuring adequate training of first responders (including police, NSW Ambulance officers and social and youth workers) in identifying VSU and the risks associated with it;

- v. The formulation of an appropriate public health education program to address VSU, informed by an expert focus group, including:
 - 1. Whether VSU should be addressed in school-based prevention programmes;
 - 2. Teacher education including as to the signs of VSU, the risks of VSU and how to deal with young people who may be engaging in VSU, whether recreationally or as chronic users;
 - 3. Parental education including as to the signs of VSU, the risk of VSU and how to deal with young people who may be engaging in VSU, whether recreationally or as chronic users;
 - 4. Providing harm reduction education for regular users of VSU;
 - 5. Promotion of links to reputable sources of information, such as the Australian Drug Foundation (and others);
 - 6. First aid training for children and young people responding to emergencies involving illicit substances, including education on the benefits of a timely medical response;
 - 7. Peer to peer education amongst adolescent and older users;
- vi. The potential utility of introducing legislation in NSW regulating the sale of volatile substances/inhalants by retailers where there are reasonable grounds to believe/suspect that the products may be abused (such as s. 23 of the Summary Offences Act 2005 (Qld) and s. 206 of the Criminal Code Act Compilation Act 1913 (WA));
- vii. The inclusion of basic life support training within the high school curriculum, so as to equip young people with basic skills to deal with medical emergencies arising from VSU;
- viii. Collaboration with the Department of Health and Aged Care (Cmth), and other state agencies and stakeholders (including youth organisations and health agencies) as to the potential resurrection of the National Inhalants Information Service website (previously operative until 2014);
- ix. Exploration of non-volatile compressed gas propellants as an alternative to hydrocarbon propellants in aerosol deodorants.

Based on the reported outcomes of the model established in Queensland, it is appropriate for NSW Health to convene a volatile substances round-table forum with diverse stakeholders representing varied interests from industry and other government agencies.

Representative NSW agencies and stakeholders considered for the NSW VSU Roundtable will share features of the membership of the Queensland 'Inhalants Roundtable' and will additionally include toxicology experts and stakeholders relevant to consideration of issues around nitrous oxide.

Representation and membership of the NSW VSU Roundtable will support consideration of topics including opportunities for data collection and surveillance, harm reduction and education, and potential regulatory changes and manufacturing alternatives for volatile substances.

The NSW Government is considering incorporating the Roundtable as part of the upcoming Drug Summit. This will be held in the Government's first term and will bring together medical experts, police, drug user organisations, families, and other stakeholders to provide a range of perspectives and build consensus on the way NSW deals with drug use and harms.

The terms of reference for the future Summit have not been finalised and will be considered by Cabinet in due course. Once this is confirmed, a more comprehensive action plan for the Roundtable will be developed.

I trust that this response confirms NSW Health's commitment to a process of continuous improvement and delivering safe and high-quality care to all patients of the NSW health system.

For more information, please contact Joanne Edwards, Executive Director, System Management Branch, NSW Ministry of Health at moh-systemmanagementbranch@health.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Ryan Park MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Regional Health
Minister for the Illawarra and the South Coast

CC: NSW Coroner's Court

Encl. Coroner's report – *Inquest into the death of Bradley Hope*