

25 August 2025

Overdose Awareness Day - Free Local Support Available in Hawkesbury and Penrith areas for Drug and Alcohol Concerns

This Sunday, 31 August is International Overdose Awareness Day. This event has its roots in Australia, beginning in 2001 as a social gathering of local people impacted by this health issue, and is now the world's largest annual campaign to end overdose.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, drug-related hospitalisations continue to increase nationally. In Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2024 published by Penington Institute, the Nepean Blue Mountains region, which covers the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas, has a higher rate of deaths by overdose than the National average.

Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, through funding from the Federal Government, has established key community-based alcohol and other drug support services across the region. These include Dianella Cottage in Katoomba and Lithgow, The Street University in Katoomba and Penrith and WHOS in Hawkesbury and Penrith.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said that she was proud to have brought these additional services to the region.

"Essential to what we do as a Primary Health Network, and as a regional health planning and funding body, is knowing our communities, understanding the local health needs and identifying what services we can bring to the region to address those needs," said Ms Reay.

"A large part of preventing overdose is breaking down the stigma of alcohol and other drug related issues and encouraging people to seek support early," she continued.

"When it comes to supporting people with alcohol and other drug concerns, it's important to recognise that not one size fits all. While residential rehabilitation services are important, they don't suit everyone. Some people have work and family responsibilities that prevent them from being able to commit to a residential program and this can act as a barrier to seeking help," said Ms Reay.

"People need to be able to seek support and get well within their own community. That's why access to free local services that offer drop in, or day programs is so important," she said.

WHOS Hawkesbury and Penrith offer free non-residential programs for people aged 18 years and over. Services include comprehensive alcohol and other drugs support, structured group work, counselling, case management, GP liaison, aftercare and relapse prevention, treatment planning, individual counselling and case-management.

The Street University, located in Penrith, provides free programs for young people aged 12-25 years. The service offers a community space that embraces art, music and culture, while providing early intervention support services for drug and alcohol and mental health concerns. The Street University also provides outreach support with specific programs for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



None of these services need a referral to access and have strong links to additional health, housing and welfare support services to help ensure the best chance of long-term recovery.

“In the past, our region has lacked alcohol and other drug support services, particularly services that engage with young people in a non-clinical setting. We are proud to have been able to address this need and to have been able to bring these services to the region,” she said.

Ms Reay added that while these services have made a real difference in the community, continued and dedicated funding was needed.

“There has been an underinvestment in community-based alcohol and other drugs services for many years. While we have seen increased investment in mental health support, the same investments haven’t been made in alcohol and other drug services, despite mental health and alcohol and other drug issues often presenting side-by-side,” she said.

“We need a strong commitment to truly tackle alcohol and other drug issues, and to move away from the current short-term funding cycle of most government services. We need funding that is ongoing, sustainable and predictable to provide certainty to the community so they can continue to have access to free support when and where they need it most,” said Ms Reay.

To learn more about one of the services mentioned, visit nbmphn.com.au/AODservices

For crisis support, **The National Alcohol & Other Drug Hotline** is a free and confidential 24/7 phone service that provides counselling, advice, and information for those struggling with addiction. Call **1800 250 015**. NSW Health also provide Web Chat, which is a free, anonymous and confidential online chat service which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Visit www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/webchat

Do you need support? More details are available below:

Street University Penrith

65 Station St, Penrith

P: 4545 3388

nbmphn.com.au/TSUPenrith

WHOs Hawkesbury

2 Forbes Street, Windsor

P: 4509 9110

nbmphn.com.au/WHOSHawkesbury

WHOS Penrith

Shop 3, 570 High St, Penrith

P: 9131 8080

nbmphn.com.au/WHOSHUB