

Radio silence

The Melbourne Central Business District, the CBD, is buzzing. The bars and clubs are full, the Asian restaurants and cafes have lines out the door. Summer is coming, people are happy, and in a small, dirty toilet in a pokie venue, a young man named Tom has overdosed. He's purple from a lack of oxygen, and he'll be dead by the time you finish reading this.

When his family find this out, their lives, as they know them to now will end. Nothing will ever be the same. Drug dependence, mental ill-health, and the judgement of society took a mother's little boy, piece by piece, and now the only piece left is the one she carries with her in her head.

But it doesn't have to be like this. If there had been a Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR) in the Melbourne CBD, Tom could still be alive.

A recent coroner's report showed that Victoria recorded its worst year in a decade for drug overdose deaths. 75% of the overdose deaths in Victoria happen in metropolitan Melbourne, and of them, the highest number of any local government area happen in the city of Melbourne, the CBD.

Yet there's radio-silence from the state government on an MSIR in the CBD. It's not like this is a radical idea, putting an MSIR in the CBD has been state government policy for years.

Twice as many people die of accidental drug overdose in Victoria than die in road accidents, yet while the Victorian police call the road deaths "unacceptable carnage", and some councils are set to

reduce speed limits, the deaths from drugs go largely unmentioned.

Where are the measures needed to address this unacceptable carnage? The state take-home naloxone program is over a year late and the second Melbourne MSIR seems a pipedream. We know that these services work. The MSIR in Richmond has responded to over 7,000 overdoses without a single death (touch wood). So why can't we just get on with it?

Nimbyism, that "Not In My Backyard" mentality, is the villain here; the dark and self-serving side of community activism. The narrow-minded and short-sighted focus on personal comfort at the expense the greater good, and the reason why people are dying in toilets and laneways. It's long past time to face the hard truth: nimbyism is costing lives in our community, and we need to shut that shit down.

A supervised injecting room in Melbourne CBD isn't an extreme action; it's just common sense with compassion. We can do this, and Tom's short story could have a different ending.

The Melbourne Central Business District, the CBD, is buzzing. The bars and clubs are full, the Asian restaurants and cafes have lines out the door. Summer is coming, people are happy, and in a small booth in the CBD MSIR, a young man named Tom has overdosed. The staff responded quickly, and Tom will live.

Gathering in support of a Medically Supervised Injecting Room in Melbourne CBD.