

Canberra Times
13 February 2013
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Naloxone drug overdose treatment program saves lives

A program that helps family and friends bring heroin users back from the brink of fatal overdose has achieved "overwhelmingly positive" results, a review has found.

The drug naloxone has been used by paramedics and hospital emergency staff to prevent overdose deaths for decades.

Naloxone reverses the effects of overdose from opioids such as heroin and counteracts the potentially fatal effects on the central nervous and respiratory systems.

The drug has been described as "remarkably safe", with little to no side effects or addictive qualities, and it has no effect on someone who has not taken opioids.

The Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy and the ACT government, along with other alcohol and drug workers, formally launched a program in early 2012 to train those closest to heroin users, teaching them how to manage overdose and properly use naloxone.

Take-home glass vials of naloxone were then handed out on prescription to 160 Canberrans.