

## **WA Sunday Times**

Sunday, January 26, 2014

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### **Saving lives for just \$40**

**PETER LAW**

Several lives have been saved through a project training illicit drug users to reverse overdoses through naloxone injections worth just \$40.

More than 100 potential witnesses to opioid overdoses, including 59 users, have been trained how to inject naloxone in a \$43,000 trial.

The medication is widely used in hospitals and by paramedics to reverse the effects of heroin and other opioids, such as methadone.

WA Substance Users Association Outreach Co-ordinator Paul Dessauer said the pilot was prompted by a rise in fatal overdoses over the past decade. National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre figures show in 2009 there were 71 people aged between 15-54 who died from accidental opioid overdoses in WA. This was up from 19 in 2004.

Mr Dessauer said the rise in fatal overdoses coincided with an increase in the purity and availability of heroin in WA.

In the trial, users were prescribed kits with two preloaded syringes of naloxone, which they can inject to help stop people dying from overdoses. Friends and family members of heroin users, as well as staff of homeless shelters, have also been trained in how to respond.

Since the project started 12 months ago there have been reports of 20 overdoses reversed with naloxone. Mr Dessauer suspected that in three of these cases it was very unlikely the person would have survived without the medication.

“In 60 per cent of overdose deaths in WA, the person who dies is not alone,” he said. “They are with someone else, but the other person doesn’t recognise an overdose is taking place, or doesn’t know how to respond appropriately.”

The Perth project, funded by the Drug and Alcohol Office, will be evaluated by Curtin University’s National Drug Research Institute.