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Planet of the vapes

EXCLUSIVE
ROBYN RILEY

VICTORIANS are vaping in record numbers, with an alarming spike in young women taking up the harmful habit, a new report by Cancer Council Victoria has found.

Eighteen to 30-year-olds now account for more than half of all e-cigarette users in Victoria (54 per cent), with health experts warning the state faces a slow-motion train wreck.

The Victorian Smoking & Health Survey released this week also found a concerningly large uptick in the number of young females, aged 18-24, vaping on e-cigarettes – up from 2.8 per cent in 2018-19 to 15.2 per cent in 2022. And the survey found there has been an almost five-fold increase in the number of people who did not smoke but now vape.

FULL REPORT, PAGE 8

EXCLUSIVE Doctor who saved Premier's life slams Dan for ignoring his pleas for urgent hospital funds



NOW WE'RE CRITICAL

SARAH BOOTH

A TOP doctor who saved Daniel Andrews' life has slammed the state government, saying he is "dumbfounded" that The Alfred hospital has not received funding for upgrades and claiming the Premier's office has ignored him.

The Alfred director of trauma service Pro-

fessor Mark Fitzgerald (left) provided critical care for Mr Andrews last year after the Premier had a horror fall, suffering severe spinal injuries, a collapsed lung and broken ribs.

Professor Fitzgerald now says he has no choice but to speak out over a lack of funding for the hospital, which he says is "well past its use-by date".

FULL REPORT, PAGES 10-11



Daniel Andrews after his release from intensive care.

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I cannot keep quiet any more

Doc who saved Dan lashes out

EXCLUSIVE
SARAH BOOTH

A TOP doctor who saved Daniel Andrews' life has slammed the state government, saying he is "dumbfounded" that The Alfred hospital has not received funding for upgrades and claiming that the Premier's office has ignored him.

The Alfred's director of trauma service, Professor Mark Fitzgerald, provided critical care for Mr Andrews last year after the Premier had a horror fall, suffering severe spinal injuries, a collapsed lung and broken ribs.

Professor Fitzgerald now says he has no choice but to speak out over a lack of funding for the hospital, which he says is "well past its use-by date".

"His (the Premier's) office won't even return my calls or emails about it," he said.

"I'm dumbfounded and I can't understand why The Alfred hasn't been promised funding to rebuild operating theatres that are 60 years old and are no longer fit for purpose, compared to all the other hospitals that have been promised funding by the Premier.

"When the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons looked at our operating theatres in 1998 ... they called them prehistoric. This (funding) has to be fixed.

"You have to play with the cards you've been dealt, but at the moment we're not even in the game. We don't even know what's going on," he said.

Health Minister Mary-Anne Thomas defended the government's funding decisions, saying it had invested more than \$150m in upgrades at The Alfred and the Paula Fox Melanoma and Cancer Centre since 2014.

"We have done thorough planning on our health projects to make sure we deliver the support and facilities Victorian patients and healthcare workers need," she said.

But Professor Fitzgerald told the Herald Sun he could not ignore funding issues any longer and accused the gov-



Professor Mark Fitzgerald

ernment of "stringing along" healthcare workers. "Nobody wants to say anything about it, because they're all too scared," he said.

Professor Fitzgerald recently visited an American hospital where patients could receive CT scans in the resuscitation room, he said, saying "one to two hour" delays in identifying time-sensitive injuries such as internal bleeding.

"We've been asking for this for nine years, and we still haven't got it," he said. "We're slipping behind."

Alfred Health chief executive Professor Andrew Way said the hospital treated some of Victoria's sickest patients and "has needed redevelopment for some time".

"We have a detailed plan to achieve this, which we have developed with the Department of Health and shared with the Victorian government.

"To continue to deliver world-class care across 19 statewide services and countless specialities, we must have a safe, modern and reliable environment for our patients and highly skilled staff. We welcome any investment from government to begin our vital rebuild," he said.

Healthcare has been at the centre of the state election

campaign, with regular announcements for new hospital funding from both sides hitting headlines most days.

The Andrews government has pledged major upgrades for hospitals including the Royal Women's and the Royal Melbourne. The Coalition's announcements included a new Albury-Wodonga Hospital and a new children's hospital in Werribee.

Despite holding a senior clinical role, Professor Fitzgerald said he had no knowledge of whether The Alfred was in line for funding, and this made it difficult to plan.

"We don't know what the future is, and it's quite an empty feeling," he said. "We need to know what we're working with. It's really affected the morale of a lot of staff.

"At least tell people, 'Look, we're going to do it in two years', or 'We're not going to do it'. Don't spring surprises on us. We're not just a throwaway line at a press conference."

He feared that experienced clinicians would be lured to other hospitals.

"People are donating huge amounts of money (to The Alfred Foundation), which is very generous," he said.

"But I want to be able to reassure donors that this place isn't going to be closed off and the site sold."

Victorian Healthcare Association deputy chief executive Juan Paolo Legaspi said "many" public health services needed funding for upgrades, and called for all political parties to commit to a more transparent funding process.

The Health Minister said "nurses and doctors are the backbone of our health system". "Since coming to government we've grown The Alfred's workforce by more than 28 per cent so more Victorians can access their world-leading care," said Ms Thomas.

"We continuously monitor population growth and demand across the health system to plan all upgrades, expansions and new projects to ensure that our health services deliver care Victorians need."

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Last lap for Grand Prix chief

EXCLUSIVE
PETER ROLFE

AUSTRALIAN Grand Prix chief executive Andrew Westacott will step down after next year's Melbourne race, in a shock departure.

Mr Westacott has been at the wheel of the Albert Park showpiece – and the Phillip Island MotoGP – since 2011, taking the Grand Prix to new heights.

His current contract runs until the end of June. With FI riding a global wave of popularity and a new deal for the race here, he was widely expected to extend his contract with the state government.

FULL REPORT, PAGE 3

ARCHIE'S FINAL BOW



PAGE 11

Rescue service hack fear

SARAH PERILLO

FIRE Rescue Victoria could be the victim of a cyber attack after the emergency service was forced to shut down its system over an outage.

The agency experienced "technical issues" to its IT system on Thursday, affecting its website and emails for more than six hours.

Acting commissioner Gavin Freeman said the outage was expected to last four days.

Mr Freeman said in the meantime the emergency service would continue to use "manual systems" to dispatch fire trucks.

FULL REPORT, PAGE 5



EXTRA BITE FOR TOP DOG
Bevo knocks back rivals to sign new deal
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ONE-ON-ONE WITH ROBBO MUST-READ INTERVIEW

EXCLUSIVE Burns experts warn of skin bank crisis as volcano blast survivor dubs shortages 'horrifying'

BURNING ISSUE

“Supply is literally a case of life or death”

STEPHANIE BROWITT



SARAH BOOTH

SOME of Australia's top burns surgeons say lessons from the Bali bombings have been forgotten, leaving the

nation underprepared for mass-casualty incidents including bushfires.

Twenty years after hospitals rallied to treat survivors of the 2002 terror attack, a leading Victorian burns sur-

geon has warned a plan developed in the aftermath has been neglected.

And the Australia and New Zealand Burn Association president described the issue as "top of the

agenda". White Island volcano blast survivor Stephanie Browitt said supply of donor skin was "literally a case of life and death" and shortages were "horrifying". FULL REPORT, PAGE 4

CRICKET STAR AIMS TO MAX HOUSE SALE PROPERTY CONFIDENTIAL P66-67

Skin shortage is 'horrifying'



Call to action on burns

EXCLUSIVE
SARAH BOOTH

SOME of Australia's top burns surgeons say lessons from the Bali bombings have been forgotten, leaving the country under-prepared for mass-casualty incidents including major bushfires.

Twenty years after the country's hospitals rallied to treat survivors of the 2002 terrorist attack, a leading Victorian burns surgeon has warned a plan developed in the aftermath, to help hospitals share resources and patients, has been neglected.

Australia and New Zealand Burn Association (ANZBA) president Jeremy Rawlins described the issue as "top of the agenda", while White Island volcano survivor Stephanie Browitt said supply of donor skin was "literally a case of life and death" and shortages were "horrifying".

Victorian Adults Burns Service director Associate Professor Heather Cleland said burns need intensive, specialist treatment.

"It only takes a few patients to overwhelm a burns service," she said.

A former ANZBA president, Prof Cleland said she was not aware of any exercise to test mass burn casualty plans, and generic disaster frameworks did not always capture burns' specific challenges.

"In the last 20 years, I haven't been involved in another exercise to test plans and frameworks and capacity," she said.

"It's pretty easy in Australia to run out of dressings, for example".

Dr Rawlins, a Perth surgeon, said historically, "we were better".

"We had systems in place," he said.

"We had Ausburnplan, which was a national plan in the event of mass casualties, for us to be able to move clinicians or indeed move patients.

"We have let that slip a little bit."

He said the profession's "close-knit" nature had covered for this drop in planning, but warned that conversations between members to co-ordinate hospital transfers themselves would not always be enough.

"We need to put those ... informal phone calls and emails into a more concrete

plan that will stand the test of time in the event of a natural disaster, or a terrorist attack or big plane crash," he said.

A 2021 McKell Institute report into Victorian burns care described Australia's system as "fragmented", while a 2020 royal commission into natural disaster arrangements noted there "may be benefit in reviewing" plans including Ausburnplan".

Prof Cleland also called for funding to establish a national skin bank to cover local shortages, and said they ran out of donor tissue in the aftermath of the 2019 White Island volcano eruption in New Zealand and the Bali bombings.

"In the Black Saturday bushfires, we ran out of skin again and we couldn't get any from the US, which is our fallback position, because they were having problems as well," she said.

"We still don't have a national stockpile should another incident like that occur, which puts us at the mercy of being able to import skin from other countries.

"(This) is really a huge deficit in our preparedness for another mass burn casualty episode."

Ms Browitt, who suffered severe burns and lost her father Paul and sister Krystal, in the tragedy off the east coast of the North Island, supported the call for change.

She said she wouldn't be alive without the donor skin that had to be flown in from the United States.

"It is incredibly horrifying to know that our lives were depending on the availability of skin donation from overseas because our own country just doesn't have enough supply for these huge disasters," she said.

"To still be facing these issues two decades later, speaks volumes of how overlooked this extremely important issue is.

"Our burn units are extremely under-prepared when it comes to readily available skin for mass casualty events.

"Australia, a bushfire-prone country, is sadly bound to suffer mass casualty events in the future."

It comes after a framework for the sector, released by the federal Health Department earlier this year,



White Island eruption survivor Stephanie Browitt now, and (inset top) soon after the accident.

acknowledged that Australia's tissue supply was "highly unlikely" to become fully self-sufficient.

"Current resourcing and infrastructure limitations mean that donation does not always proceed even where consent has been given," it stated.

Dr Rawlins said he wasn't sure if burns units which used different methods would want to devote the time and resources to reforming differing and "archaic" state laws.

But Prof Cleland said Australia's busiest burns services — including Victoria — used "lifesaving" donor tissue stored by various banks.

In a joint submission to a Black Summer senate inquiry, she and leading Queensland burns surgeon Michael Rudd said access to this tissue was part of best-practice burn care worldwide, and called for Australia to develop a stockpile.

A Victorian Health Department spokesman said it would continue to work with federal and interstate colleagues to support access to these "life-changing treatments". Victoria's guideline for managing multiple burns casualties were "regularly reviewed".

A federal Health Department spokesman said the plan which included Ausburnplan was replaced by an

updated framework for "all-hazards incident of national significance". Other post-Bali bombings recommendations, such as a deployable, emergency response team, remained.

"The Australian government recognises the need to have agreed national plans to ensure adequate capacity and support jurisdictions in the event of any mass casualty/injury event," he said.

"The treatment of burns victims occurs in hospitals, managed by individual jurisdictions. A commonwealth operated skin bank would need to be considered in the context of established state and territory banks."

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Parents Satya Taraporeddi and Chandra Lanka visit Amrita's grave on her ninth birthday; and (inset) Amrita (with her mum, above). Picture: Jake Nowakowski

'GRAVES ARE FILLING FAST'

SARAH BOOTH

Dad calls for urgent change

failure to adequately monitor her vital signs, or act on pathology re-

A REVIEW into the treatment of an eight-year-old girl who died at a Melbourne hospital has uncovered a series of errors, as her grieving parents call for change and a new rule in her name.

Amrita Lanka died at Monash Children's Hospital on April 30, a day after she was rushed to the emergency department.

On what would have been her ninth birthday, Chandra Lanka and Satya Taraporeddi gathered at their "beautiful", "kind" daughter's grave on Friday and called for an independent investigation.

In a letter to the parents, Monash Health said their Sentinel Event Review had found: AN abnormal ECG was not interpreted correctly, and the on-call cardiologist was not contacted until three hours later; THE seriousness of some abnormal blood results was not appreciated;

MONITORING of vital signs was inadequate; and THERE was a window when she probably could have been trans-

ferred for advanced care.

The letter said Amrita died of a rare heart condition called lymphocytic myocarditis, likely triggered by a viral infection.

"Early transfer to the Royal Children's Hospital may have improved her chances of survival, although the panel expressed reservations, given the severity . . . of the myocarditis," the letter stated.

Her parents said Amrita's death was preventable, their concerns were at times dismissed and there were signs Amrita was seriously unwell well before the time period covered by the review. They are pushing for the introduction of "Amrita's Rule", a statewide escalation process for families who feel their concerns about loved ones are not being heard by hospital staff.

Mr Lanka said they were speaking out to prevent other children from dying.

"Health Minister, the graves are filling fast," he said.

"So please do act fast. The

health system is broken."

He said they should have spent Friday "celebrating her birthday with gifts and cakes".

"But here we are mourning on her birthday," he said. "Every day is hell for us. Monash Hospital had sealed her fate."

Mum Satya Taraporeddi said the situation was "torture".

"How painful and unbearable for all the parents," she said.

Amrita's death has been referred to Safer Care Victoria.

Her death is among a spate of cases that have led senior doctors to call for a review of the state's paediatric emergency care, as revealed by the Herald Sun last month.

The family is working with Slater & Gordon's Lee Kimonides to investigate a medical negligence claim.

Ms Kimonides said "crucial questions" still needed to be investigated.

"It appears from the medical records that there were deficiencies in Amrita's care, including a

failure to adequately monitor her vital signs, or act on pathology re-

sults," she said.

"The horror of Amrita's deterioration unfolded before her parents' eyes. What happened to her is every parent's worst nightmare, knowing your child is seriously ill while the hospital is brushing your concerns aside, culminating in the death of a bright and beautiful little girl."

A health department spokesman said escalation processes would change if experts recommended this.

Escalation protocols for parents, family and carers are tailored to each health service.

A Monash Health spokesman said they were "deeply saddened" by Amrita's death and would implement each of the review's recommendations in full.

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