



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

MEDIA RELEASE – VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE – 26 MARCH 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coronial inquest into the death of Harley Larking

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (**VALS**) is representing the family of Harley Larking at a five-day Coronial Inquest hearing into his death. The hearing will run until 29 March 2019.

Harley, a Nunga and Palawa man born in Adelaide but living in Melbourne from age 7, tragically passed away on 13 May 2016 at 23 years of age. On that day, Harley absconded from the Northern Hospital's psychiatric unit where he was an involuntary inpatient, and then lost his life through suspected self-immolation in a nearby park some hours later.

VALS will be seeking a number of recommendations from the Coroner, including improvements in the provision and resourcing of culturally appropriate mental health care to Aboriginal Victorians. The Coroner will also consider whether the Northern Hospital and North Western Mental Health (who provide mental health services at the Northern Hospital) appropriately responded to infrastructure risks, and the adequacy of Victoria Police's investigation following Harley's death.

Quotes attributable to Moricia Vrymoet, Director of Legal and Client Services at VALS:

"VALS and Harley's family will be asking the Coroner to make recommendations to improve the care of Aboriginal mental health patients in Victoria."

"Aboriginal mental health workers play a vital role in fostering social and emotional well-being. They can help ensure patients understand and consent to the treatment they are receiving and support them in their communities during their journey of recovery."

"Cultural support is particularly important for Aboriginal people detained under the Mental Health Act who have severely limited access to family and community cultural support."

"Aboriginal mental health workers could be playing a much greater role within mental health settings than they currently do. We want to see these workers involved by clinical and other staff in key treatment and other decisions, to better harness their unique ability to connect with patients and provide the best care and support."

"The evidence suggests that Harley engaged best with his Aboriginal mental health workers, and we are concerned that this type of care does not appear to have been consistently provided to him."

"Culturally safe care means nursing and clinical staff working alongside Aboriginal health workers to ensure that patients understand and engage in treatment, and so that cultural considerations are factored into care decisions."

"We have written to representatives of the Royal Commission into Mental Health to alert them to this important inquest, and hope they will pay close attention to any recommendations around improved cultural competency for Aboriginal patients in a mental health setting".

NOTE FOR MEDIA - For cultural reasons, neither the family of Harley Larking nor the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service or any of its representatives wish to make any further comment to the media about this case at this time.