

## Information for Media in Western Australia

### What is volatile substance use?

Volatile substance use (VSU), also known as **inhalant use, solvent use, sniffing or chroming**, is the deliberate inhalation of substances that produce a vapour or gas at room temperature, for their intoxicating effects. There are hundreds of products that can be inhaled for the purpose of intoxication, many of which are easy to access from around the home and can be purchased at a wide range of retail outlets and online.

Products include **petrol, paint, glue**, other **solvents** such as paint thinner, a wide range of **aerosols**, and **gases** such as **nitrous oxide** and **butane** (cigarette lighter refill).

Many people are not aware that these products are intoxicating substances, so it is important that media reporting does not inadvertently raise people's awareness to a harmful practice they may not have previously known about.

### The role of the media

The way the media reports VSU can have significant impact on individuals and communities. As a key influencer of public perception, the media plays a critical role in shaping how society understands and responds to the issue.

When reporting is responsible and well-informed, it can help prevent the unintended 'advertising' effect and subsequent 'copycat' behaviour, particularly among young people.

In contrast, irresponsible reporting has the potential to inadvertently raise awareness of VSU, which may encourage experimentation, contribute to community panic and even exacerbate local outbreaks. Moreover, stigmatising language or narratives can marginalise those who use volatile substances, making them less likely to seek help or support.

Given the substantial risks associated with VSU and the high potential for harm, such as serious injury or even death, it is vital that reporting on VSU is accurate, factual and sensitive.

By reporting responsibly, the media can play a constructive role in reducing harm, supporting prevention efforts, and encouraging help-seeking behaviour.

### Tips for responsible reporting

The following is a guide for how to report about volatile substance use responsibly.

#### When reporting on volatile substance use, it is important avoid:

- detailed descriptions or specific names of products
- information about where to purchase the product, or its price
- image or video footage of products or related paraphernalia
- descriptions or depictions of how the product is used, particularly of how to inhale or access the product from its container.

#### Instead, aim to:

- use general terms such as "*inhalant use*" and broad category descriptions such as "*solvent*," "*aerosol*," or "*gas*"
- highlight the serious health risks and potential dangers, including the risk of death
- emphasise the importance of help-seeking, for example, calling an ambulance in a medical emergency or accessing support from alcohol and other drug professionals
- include information on how to seek help, along with contact details for local support services.

#### To minimise harm and stigma, it is advisable to:

- avoid placing stories on the front page or giving them repeated coverage
- refrain from sensationalising, glamorising, or dramatising the topic
- use respectful, person-centred language, for example, say "*a person who uses volatile substances*" rather than "*a volatile substance user*".



For further guidance, see the following helpful guidelines:

- **Mindframe:** Guidelines for communicating about alcohol and other drugs [mindframemedia.imgix.net/assets/src/uploads/Mindframe\\_AOD\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://mindframemedia.imgix.net/assets/src/uploads/Mindframe_AOD_Guidelines.pdf)
- **Australian Press Council Guideline:** Drugs and drug addiction [presscouncil.org.au/document/guideline-drugs-and-drug-addiction](http://presscouncil.org.au/document/guideline-drugs-and-drug-addiction)

## Promoting local contact numbers

The media is encouraged to provide contact details for support and information about volatile substances. In Western Australia these are:

- ADSL is a free, confidential telephone counselling, information and referral service for anyone concerned about their own, or another's, drug use. The service is available 24 hours, seven days a week.  
**Alcohol and Drug Support Line (ADSL)**  
9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (toll free for country callers) [admhss.mhc.wa.gov.au/get-help/alcohol-and-drug-support-line](http://admhss.mhc.wa.gov.au/get-help/alcohol-and-drug-support-line)
- PFDSL is a free confidential alcohol and other drug telephone counselling and referral service for parents and families, which is available 24 hours, seven days a week. Callers can choose to speak to a professional counsellor or a trained parent volunteer with personal experience of drug use in their family.  
**Parent and Family Drug Support Line (PFDSL)**  
9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (toll free for country callers) [admhss.mhc.wa.gov.au/get-help/parent-and-family-drug-support-line](http://admhss.mhc.wa.gov.au/get-help/parent-and-family-drug-support-line)

## ? Further information

For more information about volatile substance use, visit the Mental Health Commission's VSU website [vsu.mhc.wa.gov.au](http://vsu.mhc.wa.gov.au) or scan the QR code



Media enquiries should be directed to the Mental Health Commission's Media and Communications team on  
Mobile: **0436 470 845**  
Email: **media@mhc.wa.gov.au**



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