

PILL TESTING

Current Issue

- In a media article in the *Courier Mail* on 24 July 2019, Minister Hunt expressed his support for the Tasmanian Government's opposition to pill testing in response to Hobart City Council voting in support of pill testing at major events.
- Minister Hunt stated:
 - Pill testing is a "dangerous and unfounded course of action".
 - "These are drugs which are illegal for a reason. They are illicit because they can kill.", and
 - "So this is not a position that the Australian Government will be adopting; it is a position that the Australian Government will be opposing."
- Hobart City Council plans to continue their push and will write to the state government outlining their position once the NSW coronial inquest into drug deaths at music festivals has delivered its findings.
- The inquest has been looking into six drug-related deaths in NSW in 2017 and 2018 and recommendations are expected to be delivered in October 2019.

Government standard lines on pill testing

- The issue of pill testing is largely a matter for the states and territories.
- The Australian Government supports decisions not to use illicit drugs, and does not support pill testing as it could imply that illicit drugs are safe.
- All illicit drug use contains inherent risks and even taking a known substance can result in unintended harms.
 - It is important to note that pill testing may not be able to identify all components in an illicit substance and does not take into account any underlying health conditions a person may have or interactions with any other substances or medications a person may have taken.

KEY POINTS

- A number of young people are believed to have died from taking illicit drugs at Australian music festivals since September 2018. This has renewed calls for pill testing in Australia.

- The NSW Coroner will hold an inquest into suspected drug induced deaths at NSW music festivals. The inquest will be held over a two week period July 2019.

MO COMMENTS [MO input only]

- Federal Labor is uncommitted on this issue
- “On one hand, it’s illegal what they’re doing, on the other hand if it’s happening and people are dying, do we not have an obligation to make them safer? So it’s not an easy issue. Bill Shorten Jan 15 doorstep
- NSW Labor has committed to holding a drug summit and would consider allowing pill testing at music festivals.

BACKGROUND

- Drug laws in Australia are guided by both State and Federal laws. Laws concerning the possession, supply and manufacture of illicit drugs are largely the remit of States and Territories. The Commonwealth code covers offences involving importing and exporting drugs.
- The ACT is currently the only state and territory to have conducted pill testing.

State and territory position on pill testing

Jurisdiction	Support	Under Consideration
ACT	Y	Y
NSW	N	N
VIC	N	N
QLD	?	Y
WA	N	N
SA	N	N
NT	N	N

TAS	N	N
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Department of Health

- The Department of Health is the Australian Government lead agency on the National Drug Strategy.
- Decisions around applications for events on Commonwealth land are a matter for the National Capital Authority.
- The Department has not provided any advice to Minister Hunt or any other Commonwealth Ministers or Departments in relation to pill testing.

ACT Pill testing trials

- On April 28 2019, the second trial of a pill testing service was conducted in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) by Pill Testing Australia (rebranded from Safety Testing Advisory Service at Festivals and Events (STA-SAFE)) at the “Groovin’ the Moo” festival at Exhibition Park in Canberra.
- The ANU has been engaged by Pill Testing Australia to undertake an evaluation of the pill testing trial.
- On 29 April 2018, the first Australian pill testing trial was undertaken in the ACT at the “Groovin’ the Moo” music festival.
- On 20 June 2018, STA-SAFE released a report on the trial that claimed the trial was an “overwhelming success” and highlighted:
 - 125 people visited the pill testing service, with 85 samples tested (and 83 providing usable test results);
 - 20% of the samples tested included cutting agents such as caffeine oil, dietary supplements; and
 - 58% of those using the service indicated that the results of the pill testing would not modify their behaviour in the amount of the drug they would consume or decision to use the drug at all.

NSW Government

- On 28 February 2019, the NSW Government introduced a new music festival licensing scheme for higher risk music festivals to improve their safety.
- This follows advice from an expert panel that recommended applying a more rigorous regulatory framework to music festivals in NSW.
- The NSW Government formed an expert panel to advise them on how to make music festivals safer. Pill testing was not being considered.

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