

Should Australia institute pill testing at music festivals?

What they said...

'They have the power to be able to put a safety net in place'

A mother, whose son died of a drug overdose at a music festival in 2012, urging authorities to introduce pill testing

'It's a fairy floss safety net'

Louise Roberts, writing in The Daily Telegraph

The issue at glance

On January 12, 2019, a 19-year-old woman died after a suspected overdose at the FOMO music festival being held at Parramatta. She was one of an unprecedented spike in drug-related deaths at music festivals in Australia at the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019. In the last four months of 2018 and the first month of 2019 there was a dramatic spike in the incidence of deaths resulting from illicit drug use at music festivals.

Between September 2018 and January 12, 2019, five people aged between 19 and 23 died after taking drugs at festivals in New South Wales. <https://tonedeaf.thebrag.com/19-year-old-died-suspected-overdose-fomo-festival/>

On January 1, 2019, 20-year-old Victorian man died after a suspected overdose at the Beyond The Valley festival. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jan/01/beyond-the-valley-festival-man-dies-suspected-drug-overdose>

The large number of deaths have led to calls from the Australian Drug and Alcohol Foundation, the Australian Medical Association and others for Australian states to introduce at least further trials of pill testing as a means of reducing the problem.

In April, 2018, the Australian Capital Territory had approved the country's first pill testing trial at the Groovin the Moo festival. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-30/groovin-the-moo-pill-testing-finds-lethal-product/9710112>

Currently other state governments are opposed to the move.

Background

Pill testing or drug checking, as it is known in the Northern Hemisphere, is a way to reduce the harm from drug consumption by allowing users to find out the content and purity of substances that they intend to consume. This empowers users to make safer choices: to avoid more dangerous substances, to use smaller quantities, and to avoid dangerous combinations. Pill testing services have developed over the last twenty-five years in twenty countries and are being considered in others, although attempts to implement them in some jurisdictions have been hindered by local laws. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug_checking

Pill testing initially focused on MDMA (the primary component of ecstasy) consumed at electronic dance music events but the services have broadened as drug use has become more complex. These developments have been strongly affected by local laws and culture, resulting in a diverse range of services, both for mobile services that attend events and festivals and fixed sites in town centres and entertainment districts. For instance, staff may or may not be able to handle illegal substances, which limits the use of testing techniques to those where the staff are not legally in possession of those substances.

People intending to take drugs provide a small sample to the testing service (often less than a single dose). Test results may be provided immediately, after a short waiting period, or later. Pill testing services use this time to discuss health risks and safe behaviour with the service

users. The services also provide public health information about drug use, new psychoactive substances and trends at a national level. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug_checking

The pill testing equipment used in Australia

Australia's first professionally administered pill-testing facility was in a mobile laboratory at Canberra's Groovin' the Moo festival in April, 2018. The testers used an infrared spectrometer to identify substances in a sample of each pill.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/what-is-pill-testing-20190103-p50pg5.html>

The Loop, a pill testing service in the United Kingdom, has explained how the infrared spectrometer works. 'Infrared spectroscopy works by shining different wavelengths of infrared light onto a solid sample which will partly absorb certain wavelengths according to its chemical structure. Because every drug has a unique chemical structure, the absorption behaviour is unique for every compound which allows us to plot a graph called an absorption spectrum. We can then use a computer algorithm to compare this unique absorption spectrum to a huge database of substances measured by labs around the world to locate the closest match with extreme accuracy.'

<https://wearetheloop.org/equipment>

(Commercially available "do it yourself" pill-testing kits have been used by some festival-goers for years. Each kit contains a solution which, dropped onto a grounded-up sample of a pill, will change colours to show the presence or absence of a substance such as MDMA. But these kits cannot confirm dose levels of a particular drug and do not provide information on other potentially dangerous cutting agents.) <https://www.smh.com.au/national/what-is-pill-testing-20190103-p50pg5.html>

Impact of pill testing https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug_checking

Pill testing has been shown to be an effective way to reduce the harm from drug use through informing safer use, limiting use, and helping users avoid the most dangerous substances. The services also provide monitoring and detection of new psychoactive substances to inform public health interventions. The Loop have stated that 20% of samples are handed in for disposal and 40% of service users reduce intake. KnowYourStuffNZ have found that, when substances are not as expected, half of service users state they will not take that substance and a quarter say they will take a smaller quantity. Pill testing services also reach drug users who are not reached by existing services. Evidence from research conducted by Austrian pill testing service CheckIt! found 58% of people who use the service would not otherwise seek out harm reduction information, and about 75% are more likely to access harm reduction services if pill testing is included.

Academic research from the United Kingdom has found that one in five substances were not what they were expected to be and two-thirds of misrepresented samples were disposed of. Such on-site testing accesses otherwise hard-to-reach user groups to reduce the harms associated with drug use.

How pill testing was trialled at a music festival in Australia

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/what-is-pill-testing-20190103-p50pg5.html>

Based on the Canberra's Groovin' the Moo festival trial, the process operates in this manner:

1. Attendees queue outside a tent in the medical precinct of a festival.
2. Once inside, they sign a waiver releasing the testers from liability.
3. They also speak to a peer educator to ensure they understand that the test does not guarantee the safety of the drugs.
4. Each attendee provides a sample of their drug to a licensed chemist who photographs and weighs it before putting it under an infrared spectrometer where it is mounted on a piece of

diamond and shot with laser light. Through the light reflected, the chemist can tell what is in the sample.

5. The attendee then has a consultation with another peer educator to discuss their options now they know what is in their drug.

Pill testing in other countries

There are currently 14 pill testing organisations in Europe, each with varying analysis technology and methods of operation.

The Netherlands <https://www.buzzfeed.com/elfyscott/here-are-all-the-places-in-the-world-pill-testing-is>

The Netherlands founded the Drug Information and Monitoring System (DIMS) in 1992, which was the first pill testing initiative in Europe. It currently operates at 23 fixed sites across the country. DIMS is recognised as an official branch of the public health system. The DIMS pill testing facilities offers its services to the public for two to three hours a week, using a reliable laboratory technique – gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) – to inspect pills.

People with ecstasy pills can go to the facilities and have their drugs tested for composition and dose, and receive this information within a week via a text or phone call.

DIMS staff also offer one-on-one intervention sessions to discuss the dangers of taking illicit drugs and are offered harm-reduction reading materials.

According to the Global Drug Survey 2016 most young people will now purchase drugs from alternative sources before festivals rather than from dealers at events, as these stationary labs allow them to have their drugs tested before events.

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/elfyscott/here-are-all-the-places-in-the-world-pill-testing-is>

Austria <https://www.buzzfeed.com/elfyscott/here-are-all-the-places-in-the-world-pill-testing-is>

Checkit! is an onsite pill testing service that has appeared at events, nightclubs and festivals in Austria since 1997.

Pill testing is a part of Austrian drug policy and Checkit! is a collaborative project between Addiction Support Services Vienna and the Medical University of Vienna. Pill testing is considered a legal procedure in Austria if it is conducted by a scientific institution.

Checkit! uses a number of analysis techniques that do not require a permanent laboratory (including high performance liquid chromatography) that can reliably determine compounds in pills within 20 minutes.

Checkit! communicates the danger of pills through a colour-coding system (yellow for pills that have the expected contents and red for pills that the researchers deem risky); reports with aggregated data from testing is then posted online.

At each large music event around 400 people use the pill testing services and Checkit!'s testing has been shown to decrease consumption of ecstasy pills among festival patrons if the pills contain unexpected compounds or high dosages of MDMA.

Switzerland <https://www.buzzfeed.com/elfyscott/here-are-all-the-places-in-the-world-pill-testing-is>

Pill testing has been offered in Zurich since 2001 through mobile onsite testing at nightclubs and events run by an organisation called Safer Party as well as the Drug Information Centre (DIZ), which provides pill testing twice a week.

Pill testing is considered to be an important part of Swiss drug policy and these testing sites are run through Zurich's city government.

In 2016, 2,078 substance analyses were performed through Safer Party and the DIZ, with 794 online alerts published as a result that indicated unexpected psychoactive substances in pills or dangerously high dosages of MDMA.

3,050 visitors used the pill testing and counselling services in 2016 and the researchers continue to emphasise to visitors that consuming drugs despite testing remains a risky activity.

Spain and Portugal <https://www.buzzfeed.com/elfyscott/here-are-all-the-places-in-the-world-pill-testing-is>

Energy Control was founded in 1999 and operates four fixed laboratory sites in Spain and Portugal as well as mobile, on-site testing at nightclubs and festivals.

The organisation offers both extremely reliable testing within the labs and a scaled-down version for its mobile sites that can tell visitors the contents of their pills and the quantity of those compounds.

The fixed labs are open to the public once a week and each collect between 50 and 80 samples weekly. The mobile sites each collect up to 150 samples per night.

Energy Control also surveys its visitors to track their harm reduction strategies and evaluate the success of the service. It has been able to compile a huge amount of data about the illicit drug market, and regularly publishes academic papers.

Energy Control also tests LSD (acid) at its labs and in 2014 identified 24 samples on the first day of Portugal's Boom Festival that contained 25x-NBOMe, a potent, potentially life-threatening synthetic hallucinogenic compound.

After an alert was disseminated, researchers found that on the second day of the festival an unexpected proportion of tests were for LSD.

Energy Control has operated in Colombia since 2013, offering high quality analyses at nightclubs, festivals and events.

United Kingdom <https://www.buzzfeed.com/elfyscott/here-are-all-the-places-in-the-world-pill-testing-is>

The Loop is an organisation founded in 2013 that runs onsite drug testing at festivals and clubs, providing harm reduction materials, brief interventions with the service users and medical assistance.

The Loop uses technology that can tell visitors the ingredients and quantity of compounds in their pills after approximately 45 minutes.

United Kingdom police are supportive of the service, and The Loop works with police, health and welfare organisations, researchers and politicians.

The service tests 100 to 200 samples from ecstasy pills per day and reached a maximum capacity of testing in 2017 with 500 pills being tested per day across three music festivals.

The Loop also posts warnings on its Twitter account about dangerous ingredients in pill batches or pills that contain extremely high quantities of MDMA.

Internet information

On February 1, 2019, news.com.au published a report titled 'An inside look at drug networks flooding music festivals — and police are struggling to stop them'

The report looks at the apparent growth of criminal networks supplying drugs at Australian music festivals.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.news.com.au/national/crime/an-inside-look-at-drug-networks-flooding-music-festivals-and-police-are-struggling-to-stop-them/news-story/fef8ce6865beddcca9eb1df018c91c9b>

On January 24, 2019, The Catholic Weekly presented a background piece outline the major arguments offered for and against the introduction of pill testing in Australia.
The full text can be accessed at <https://www.catholicweekly.com.au/pill-testing-arguments-for-and-against/>

On January 21, 2019, BuzzFeed News published a report on the Victorian government's continued opposition to the introduction of pill testing.
The full text can be accessed at <https://www.buzzfeed.com/bradesposito/victoria-pill-testing-harm-reduction>

On January 14, 2019, SBS News published an overview on recent calls for pill testing to be introduced in Australia and on government responses.
The full text can be accessed at <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/music-festival-overdoses-spark-calls-for-pill-testing-but-how-does-it-work>

On January 14, 2019, ABC News published a fact check titled 'Six claims about pill testing — and whether or not they're true'
The full text can be accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2019-01-15/pill-testing-claims-put-to-the-test/10703370>

On January 7, 2019, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners published an overview titled 'State of play: For and against pill testing'
The article presents the arguments for and against the introduction of pill testing in Australia.
The full text can be accessed at <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/state-of-play-for-and-against-pill-testing>

On January 5, 2019, The Courier Mail published a comprehensive overview by Greg Stolz of the arguments for and against pill testing. The piece is titled 'Drug deaths at music festivals reignite debate on pill testing'
The full text can be accessed at <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/insight/drug-deaths-at-music-festivals-reignites-debate-on-pill-testing/news-story/1e252b8afb6a46c782eb00fcf81c9303>

On January 2, 2019, ABC News published a report titled 'Parents call for pill testing as man dies from suspected drug overdose at Beyond The Valley music festival'
The report looks at the growing demands for the introduction of pill testing after another death at an Australian music festival.
The full text can be accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-02/pill-testing-drug-man-dies-beyond-the-valley-festival-overdose/10677580>

On December 21, 2018, ABC News gave an overview of the evidence for and against the introduction of pill testing.
The full text can be accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2018-12-21/guide-to-pill-testing-at-australian-music-festivals/10638732>

On November 21, 2018, The Mercury published an opinion piece by Alison Lai, chief executive of the Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council of Tasmania, titled 'Pill testing — because we can't wait until someone dies'
Lai argues that pill testing offers sufficient potential benefits to warrant Tasmania testing its effectiveness.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-pill-testing-because-we-cant-wait-until-someone-dies/news-story/8aa4d0756be93fb70dd7a741ca1329b6>

On September 19, 2018, Ten Daily published a background piece titled 'How Pill Testing Would Work in Australia'

The full text can be accessed at <https://10daily.com.au/news/australia/a180918kgu/the-facts-how-pill-testing-would-work-in-australia-20180918>

On July 3, 2018, The Conversation published an opinion piece by Alison Ritter, Professor and Specialist in Drug Policy at the University of New South Wales, titled 'Six reasons Australia should pilot "pill testing" party drugs'.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/six-reasons-australia-should-pilot-pill-testing-party-drugs-34073>

On May 2, 2018, The Parliamentary Library of the Parliament of Australia published a background paper titled 'The pros and cons of pill testing'

The paper gives an overview of major arguments for and against pill testing.

The full document can be accessed at

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2018/May/The_pros_and_cons_of_pill_testing

On April 30, 2018, ABC News published a report titled 'Groovin the Moo pill tests find lethal stimulant, paint and toothpaste in drugs' The report looks at what was detected during Australia's first trial of pill testing at a music festival.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-30/groovin-the-moo-pill-testing-finds-lethal-product/9710112>

On April 10, 2018, Deakin University published an updated version of an opinion piece by Peter Miller, Professor of Psychology in the Faculty of Health, Deakin University, titled 'Why pill testing has never been trialled in Australia' The paper looks at the political, policy and public health consideration which had shaped Australia's refusal to trial pill testing up to that time.

The full text can be accessed at <https://this.deakin.edu.au/society/why-pill-testing-has-never-been-trialled-in-australia>

On April 4, 2018, the Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation published an overview of its arguments in favour of Australian states introducing pill testing.

The full text can be accessed at <https://adf.org.au/insights/drug-checking-a-harm-reduction-strategy/>

On January 20, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published an opinion by Andrew Leibie, a scientist with Safework Laboratories, and a member of the International Association of Forensic Toxicologists, titled 'Pill testing sounds like a great idea, but there's a catch' Leibie highlights the limitations of certain pill testing procedures used at music festivals.

On January 5, 2017, The Daily Telegraph published an opinion piece by Louise Roberts titled 'Pill testing won't save people. Common sense will'

Roberts argues for abstinence and penalties as more effective measure to ensure public safety than pill testing.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/pill-testing-wont-save-people-common-sense-will/news-story/f090e692508e4d3a671503ade59830a6>

Arguments in favour of pill testing at music festivals

1. Pill testing is intended to reduce the risk of an existing practice, not promote illegal drug taking

Supporters of pill testing or drug checking argue that the process is not intended to encourage the use of illegal drugs. The Alcohol and Drug Foundation issued a statement explaining the nature and purpose of drug checking on April 4, 2018. This indicates, 'It is especially important to note that drug checking does not promote illicit drug taking, and people who choose to get their substances tested have already purchased their drug with the intention to use them.' <https://adf.org.au/insights/drug-checking-a-harm-reduction-strategy/>

The purpose of pill testing is to promote the safe use of illicit drugs by users who have already purchased the product. Numerous drug experts have advised that young people, in particular, commonly take illicit drugs recreationally despite their illegality. For the majority of these users, this behaviour is experimental and short-term, associated with heightening the pleasure of a particular social event. Supporters of pill testing argue that what it is intended to do is help ensure that this drug use does not prove fatal.

The Out of Home Care Toolbox site refers to the 2001 research of Steinberg and Morris which concludes, 'Most young people will experiment with alcohol and potentially other drugs at some stage. [It is necessary to] distinguish between occasional experimentation and enduring patterns of dangerous or troublesome behaviour. Many prevalence studies indicate that rates of occasional, usually harmless, experimentation far exceed rates of enduring problems.' <https://www.oohctoolbox.org.au/why-young-people-use-drugs>

In an opinion piece published in The Conversation on July 3, 2018, outlining the advantages of pill testing, Alison Ritter, Professor and Specialist in Drug Policy at the University of New South Wales, noted that a significant number of young people are already using illicit drugs recreationally and that the community has a responsibility to help to ensure they do so as safely as possible. Professor Ritter states, 'A 2010 survey found more than 11 percent of 20- to 29-year-olds and 7 percent of 18- to 19-year-olds had taken the drug (ecstasy) in the previous 12 months. According to annual research among 1,000 ecstasy users, 70 percent of these pills are taken at clubs, festivals and dance parties.' <https://theconversation.com/six-reasons-australia-should-pilot-pill-testing-party-drugs-34073>

More recent Australian data indicates that in 2016 43 per cent of people aged 14 and older reported they had used an illicit drug at some point in their lives and 28 per cent of people in their 20s said they had used illicit drugs in the past year.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/effectiveness-of-pill-testing-is-inconclusive-so-we-should-trial-it-20190109-p50qdd.html>

As proof that pill testing does not promote illegal drug use, it has been noted by that in countries that have introduced pill testing operations, there has been no increase in drug use. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/elfyscott/here-are-all-the-places-in-the-world-pill-testing-is>

A report from Switzerland's Research Institute for Public Health and Addiction concluded that a drug checking service combined with a consultation session does not, as some would claim, encourage consumption. <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/abc-fact-check-takes-on-pill-testing/10012870>

2. Illegal recreational drugs are killing festival goers

Many of those who argue for pill-testing at music festivals and other major sites of recreational illicit drug use argue that this would be an important step in reducing the increasing number of deaths attributable to these drugs.

The Pennington Institute released its annual Australian overdose report on August 30, 2018. The report indicates that deaths by accidental drug overdose have consistently increased across the country over the past 15 years and now significantly outnumber the road toll. <https://www1.racgp.org.au/news/clinical/australian-drug-overdose-deaths-are-increasing-%E2%80%93-a>

In the last four months of 2018 and the first month of 2019 there was a dramatic spike in the incidence of deaths resulting from illicit drug use at music festivals. Between September 2018 and January 12, 2019, five people aged between 19 and 23 died after taking drugs at festivals in New South Wales. <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/nsw-inquest-may-look-at-more-festival-drug-deaths/news-story/e3187727bf388fe37464a7138840dd47> On January 1, 2019, a 20-year-old Victorian man died after a suspected overdose at the Beyond The Valley festival. <https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/5833330/enough-is-enough-call-for-pill-testing-at-music-festivals-after-victorian-dies/>

Former Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Palmer has referred to these fatalities as 'the most lethal summer of festival deaths on record'. The Commissioner has further stated 'Against any criteria we simply lost way too many kids this past summer, and many others went perilously close. Surely you can no longer ignore the experts who tell us that a pill testing trial is simply common sense.'

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/former-federal-police-commissioner-mick-palmer-wants-drug-summit-after-lethal-summer/news-story/9c8ac28742a84e565d673c1bfc90e05b>

These deaths have led to other calls for pill testing at Australian music festivals from those who believe that the measure would serve to save lives. Dr Alex Wodak, president of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation, has stated, 'We know in Australia, every summer, there are deaths of young people. These deaths are so preventable, so needless. It is really just ridiculous how stubborn politicians are being.' <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/how-pill-testing-could-change-australian-music-festivals>

Referring to the reduced fatalities achieved through the use of pill testing in Europe, Dr Wodak has queried, 'Why can't we learn from that experience, why are we so rigidly sticking with an approach?' <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/how-pill-testing-could-change-australian-music-festivals>

The mother of one of the young festival goers to die at the end of 2018 as a result of drug use at a music festival has called for pill testing as a way of reducing this loss of life. Mrs Julie Tam has stated, 'The government must get behind a system that will increase awareness and education to minimise harm.'

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/josh-tams-mothers-plea-over-pill-testing/news-story/a7150ed943128f5af9f02722aa962c5b>

Supporters of pill-testing claim its capacity to reduce the harm done to illegal drug users has been clearly demonstrated. Fiona Measham, Professor of criminology at Durham University, has noted that following the United Kingdom's first pill testing trial in 2016, 'There was a 95 per cent reduction in hospital admissions that year when we were testing on site.'

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2018-12-21/guide-to-pill-testing-at-australian-music-festivals/10638732>

3. There is no regulation of the content of illegal recreational drugs

Those who support pill testing or drug checking stress the uncertainty of the illegal drug market. The drugs offered for sale are completely unregulated with no guarantee of either purity, quality or indication of the nature of contaminants. This lack of regulation and resultant uncertainty regarding the product results in greatly elevated risks for users.

The Australian government Health Direct sites advises, 'Unlike prescription medical drugs, there is no quality control process for making many party drugs, because most of them are illegal. This means you don't really know how strong the drug is and what other substances have been added to each batch. For example, ecstasy can be made using drain cleaner or battery acid.' <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/party-drugs>

Both the purity of the drug being taken and the nature of the contaminants or cutting agents with which it is mixed can dramatically influence the effect the drug has upon the user. Catherine Quinn, who heads the Victoria Police's forensic lab, has indicated that the purity of individual ecstasy pills can vary widely from as little as five percent of the active ingredient (MDMA) in each pill or capsule to as much as 60 percent. Quinn warns, 'The higher the purity of drug within a tablet the greater the risk or the more potent it could be for an adverse effect.'

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-15/ecstasy-government-pressured-to-consider-party-drug-testing/7166220>

On March 13, 2019, the Ted Noffs Foundation drug and alcohol rehabilitation program declared its support for pill testing, detailing the inevitable unreliability of illegal drugs. The Foundation stated, 'There is no way of knowing the contents of a pill or capsule simply by looking at it. While various online drug forums such as Pill Report have compiled a database of pills and their contents based on anecdotal evidence, this is far from a foolproof strategy. A pill testing program can benefit recreational drug users by scientifically testing and revealing the contents of the substance they are intending to consume. An individual can then make an informed decision as to whether or not they will use the drug.' <https://noffs.org.au/blog/pill-testing-as-a-harm-reduction-strategy/>

Geoff Munro, the policy manager at the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, similarly commented favourably on the first drug pill test trial held at Canberra's Groovin the Moo music festival in April, 2018. Mr Munro stated, 'When people are buying pills and powders on the street they can never be sure what is in them. Very often people are playing Russian roulette. It may be a highly dangerous chemical, or it may be a much stronger drug than they believe it is.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/29/first-ever-pill-testing-trial-at-australian-music-festival>

Some commentators have noted that the variability of illegal drugs offered for sale in Australia is particularly high relative to many other countries. Political analyst, Carl Schelling, in an opinion piece published by Liberty Works on February 8, 2019, stated, 'The purity of MDMA tablets in Australia routinely ranks at the bottom of developed nations. A study conducted by American Addiction Centers found that MDMA pill purity was 16.1 percent, the lowest of all developed nations surveyed...Netherlands, a country which pursues a far more liberal approach to drug use, came in at 68.8 percent while also having a lower rate of ecstasy related hospitalisations and deaths.'

The same study also found that Australian pills tested highest in the developed world for substitute substances like MDA and other amphetamines, substances that are far more chemically dangerous and easier to produce than MDMA.' <https://libertyworks.org.au/the-case-for-pill-testing/>

4. Pill testing has improved the quality of the illegal drugs offered for sale

Supporters of pill testing claim that having testing facilities at festivals affects the quality of drugs being offered for sale. It is argued that when drug traffickers know that their product can be tested and rejected if found to be contaminated or otherwise inferior, they are more careful about what they attempt to sell.

In 2014 Professor Alison Ritter, Director of the Drug Policy Modelling Program at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) outlined a number of reasons why pill

testing should be piloted. First among these were 'pill testing has been shown to change the black market, with products publicly identified as dangerous being found to leave the market' and '[the] ingredients of tested pills started to correspond to the expected components over time, suggesting that pill testing can place pressure on manufacturers to refrain from using adulterants in drugs.'

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2018/May/The_pros_and_cons_of_pill_testing

Professor Ritter drew on European research in support of her conclusions. Part of this research was 'An inventory of on-site pill-testing interventions in the EU' published in 2001 by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, which stated '[I]t may be assumed that in the long run pills that are labelled with "unexpected or especially dangerous content" cannot be sold easily anymore which subsequently has to be seen as a success for public health.'

http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_2878_EN_pill_testing_report.pdf

Dr Alex Wodak, president of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation, has similarly claimed pill testing not only influences the behaviour of drug takers but also of those selling the drugs. Dr Wodak has claimed that drug suppliers are less likely to bring 'their most dangerous products' to pill tested events. He has explained, 'When people find out that they're dangerous they try to get their money back. That goes back up the system and suppliers face lots of angry abuse. It changes the whole system.'

Some of those supporting pill testing have argued that if New South Wales does not adopt the measure this will increase the likelihood that the state will have even more contaminated drugs sold at festivals. This is because, while Canberra offers pill testing, drug dealers will sell their safer products there and their more contaminated products in New South Wales. This point has been made by Shane Rattenbury, the Australian Capital Territory's Minister for Justice. Rattenbury has stated, 'We have been informed by policy experts... that if NSW does not introduce pill testing there is a significant risk that drug suppliers will respond by supplying higher quality, less dangerous, pills to festivals in the ACT while offloading lower quality and more dangerous drugs in NSW.'

This is because pill testing in the ACT will increase the risk of exposure for suppliers who sell poor quality and more dangerous products. There will then be a deterrent for the sale of these drugs into the ACT market and the NSW market will be the more attractive and less risky option for poor-quality drugs. ' <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jan/23/nsws-resistance-to-pill-testing-will-drive-dealers-to-sell-more-dangerous-drugs-act-warns>

5. Pill testing involves counselling potential users regarding the dangers of drugs

Defenders of pill-testing argue that the testing process is used as an opportunity to educate potential users on the dangers of the substances they have purchased.

Dr Stephen Bright, an addiction expert at Edith Cowan University has stated, 'One of the biggest misconceptions around pill-testing is that it will portray taking drugs as safe.' Dr Bright further explained, 'Harm reduction workers always say there is no safe level of drug consumption. It's an opportunity to educate people on drugs — people who may not have seen such education in their schools, for example.'

<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/fourletter-word-a-flaw-in-antipill-testing-argument/news-story/c29f16b2865ab7f95254410ab517395a>

Dr Bright has claimed that the brief intervention component was crucial, and that there were several cases in which people who were thinking about taking ecstasy for the first time — and whose pills yielded a pure result — actually changed their mind after speaking with an

on-site expert. <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/fourletter-word-a-flaw-in-antipill-testing-argument/news-story/c29f16b2865ab7f95254410ab517395a>

Dr Bright has further stated, 'We know there's concern that pill-testing sites will endorse drug use, but it actually does the absolute opposite. Young people know using drugs is risky. We have research that demonstrates this. We also have research that shows young people are trying to find out what's in their pills.'

When you walk into a festival and you see there's a pill-testing service with information about different kinds of drugs on the market, it makes the risk real — it turns the perception of risk into real risk.' <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/fourletter-word-a-flaw-in-antipill-testing-argument/news-story/c29f16b2865ab7f95254410ab517395a>

David Caldicott, an emergency doctor who led the Canberra trial, has made the same point. Dr Caldicott has stated, 'When a person first enters the pill testing area, they are met by a "harm reduction worker". This person explains the pill testing process and advises the patron that there is no safe level of drug consumption. You will not be told at any stage that your drug is safe.' <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/fourletter-word-a-flaw-in-antipill-testing-argument/news-story/c29f16b2865ab7f95254410ab517395a>

Martyn Lloyd Jones, honorary senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne and Paul Komesaroff, professor of medicine at Monash University have also argued for the benefits to be derived from a pill testing program that includes the opportunity for advice. They have stated, 'Specifically, we support the availability of facilities to allow young people at venues or events where drug-taking is acknowledged to be likely to seek advice about the substances they're considering ingesting.' <https://theconversation.com/heres-why-doctors-are-backing-pill-testing-at-music-festivals-across-australia-109430>

A number of studies have indicated that the combined effect of counselling and testing is often that people do not take the drug. A US-Australian study published in the Drug and Alcohol Review journal In December, 2018, found that 54 per cent of ecstasy users would be less likely to use ecstasy again if they learnt it contained bath salts or methamphetamine. <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/fourletter-word-a-flaw-in-antipill-testing-argument/news-story/c29f16b2865ab7f95254410ab517395a>

Studies conducted in Hanover, Amsterdam and Vienna similarly observed, 'In the information ecstasy users obtain through pill-testing...the emphasis is always on the risks involved in ecstasy use and potential consequences of taking dangerous pills; pills are never simply given a "stamp of approval". Considering these messages, the assumption that pill-testing leads to increased ecstasy use does not seem all too probable.'

<http://www.bonger.nl/PDF/Overigen/kleinPill%20Testing%20-%20Ecstasy%20%20Prevention.pdf>

Arguments against pill testing at music festivals

1. On-site pill testing is limited and not sufficiently accurate

Opponents of pill testing argued that the on-site pill testing some advocates have proposed for Australia has limited capabilities and is not accurate.

In an article published in The Sydney Morning Herald on January 20, 2017, Andrew Leibie, a scientist with Safework Laboratories, and a member of the International Association of Forensic Toxicologists, stated, 'On-site pill testing sounds great. People take the pills they purchased at a music festival to a booth where test kits analyse whether the drugs are safe to consume. This will prevent deaths from bad batches, the reasoning goes.

It sounds fine in theory, but there is one major flaw – pill testing kits currently relied upon to deliver the results are limited by scientific realities. In fact, the proposed colourimetric on-site pill test kits provide results that are little more accurate than "best guesses".'

<https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/pill-testing-sounds-like-a-great-idea-but-theres-a-catch-20170120-gtvlu4.html>

Leibie further explained, 'From a purely practical point of view, on-site drug testing is fast and easy, but not particularly accurate. Proper analysis of pills requires highly sophisticated laboratory equipment and can take days of work by trained scientists.

SafeWork Laboratories has some of the most advanced analytical equipment in Australia. Even then, it takes us more than 24 hours to obtain detailed results. When you add the time to get the pills to the laboratory, accurate results take days, if not weeks to turn around, a timeframe that seems entirely impractical in any real-world situation.'

<https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/pill-testing-sounds-like-a-great-idea-but-theres-a-catch-20170120-gtvlu4.html>

Leibie issued an additional warning that on-site testing is not effective in detecting newly-developed drugs. He stated, 'The greatest concern however, is that on-site tests cannot detect new designer drugs on the market, such as flakka, liquid acid or NBOMe compounds.

NBOMe, or N-Bomb, is a relatively new psychoactive substance (NPS) being detected in Australia. As little as a few thousandths of a gram are enough to cause violent or frightening hallucinations, major cardiac symptoms, nausea, vomiting and potentially death.

Unfortunately, these dangerous compounds frequently are mixed with more familiar drugs, such as ecstasy, speed or ice, requiring highly advanced scientific analysis to be detected.'

<https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/pill-testing-sounds-like-a-great-idea-but-theres-a-catch-20170120-gtvlu4.html>

Leibie concluded, 'European data shows more than 100 new illicit drugs and compounds are entering the market each year. Detection of these compounds is challenging, even in advanced forensic facilities, so the reality is that pill testing kits will never be able to detect all the illicit drugs entering the community.' <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/pill-testing-sounds-like-a-great-idea-but-theres-a-catch-20170120-gtvlu4.html>

The same point has been made by Dr John Lewis, a forensic scientist from the University of Technology Sydney. Dr Lewis has warned that a festival would need a commercial quality mass-spectrometer, costing approximately \$500,000 to test products with a high degree of accuracy. <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/dangerous-delusion-of-the-pill-testing-solution/news-story/ac6d2aa8d1b16411468b3eb1dffb4e16>

Dr Lewis has further warned that even such sophisticated tests would not provide three-dimensional modelling of an ecstasy pill, so only the surface level of the pill or any scrapings could be tested. Dr Lewis has stated, 'Because chemical substances are not evenly distributed through the pill, it creates a situation where a pill could be cleared for consumption without actually being tested.' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/dangerous-delusion-of-the-pill-testing-solution/news-story/ac6d2aa8d1b16411468b3eb1dffb4e16>

Dr Lewis has further noted that MDMA is often laced with synthetic compounds which cannot be detected. He has stated, 'It might not be able to detect synthetics such as Carfentanil, which is 10,000 times more potent than morphine.' He concludes, 'We need to get away from the spin around pill-testing and look at what can and will happen if it takes place.' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/dangerous-delusion-of-the-pill-testing-solution/news-story/ac6d2aa8d1b16411468b3eb1dffb4e16>

2. Abstinence is the only certain way to end drug-related deaths at music festivals

Opponents of pill-testing generally reject the harm minimisation approach of which drug checking is a part. They argue that pill testing offers a false solution to a problem that can only be fully addressed by having festival goers refrain from taking illegal drugs. Their argument is there is no safe manner in which these drugs can be ingested and no government-endorsed measure should suggest that there is.

Opponents of pill testing argue that potential drug users need to realise that contaminants are not primarily the issue. These illegal substances are inherently unsafe and any ingestion, even of pure MDMA, is a threat to life. New South Wales chief toxicologist, Professor Andrew Dawson, has warned that even a pill of 100 percent purity can result in death. The professor has described what occurs as part of a potentially fatal reaction to MDMA. 'Normally, what will happen to people is that they will...get increasingly agitated, they can then become confused and that's often a sign they already have a temperature... They may not always be aware that they're actually hot. Once your temperature starts going above about 41 degrees, you're at a temperature where...the proteins in the body start poaching and you get multiple organs shut down. And that's actually what causes the death.'

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/dangerous-delusion-of-the-pill-testing-solution/news-story/ac6d2aa8d1b16411468b3eb1dffb4e16>

On January 5, 2017, in an opinion piece published in The Daily Telegraph, Louise Roberts argued to parents that they should aim to have their children not take drugs. Roberts wrote, 'Do you want your kids to take -illegal drugs? No.

Is there a safe way to swallow, smoke and inject these substances? Hello, that's also a no. Maintaining that message is a Parenting 101, you would think. One of those obvious things such as don't give your kids matches, knives or loaded guns to play with.'

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/pill-testing-wont-save-people-common-sense-will/news-story/f090e692508e4d3a671503ade59830a6>

Roberts points to 'harm minimisation' as a misnomer and argues that only drug education and penalties are likely to end the loss of lives. She warns, '[The] inconvenient truth is trampled in our stampede to reach the apparent nirvana of inclusion and harm minimisation.

As sure as night follows day, news of a drug-related death at a weekend music festival has reignited calls for pill testing because pill testing "saves lives"...But] who believes that an individual intent on getting high at a festival would have taken the time to test his drug before he indulged?... It's a fairy floss safety net.'

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/pill-testing-wont-save-people-common-sense-will/news-story/f090e692508e4d3a671503ade59830a6>

A similar point has been made by Tim Mander, deputy leader of Queensland's Liberal National Party. Mr Mander stated, 'We have to remember that these substances are illegal and they're illegal for a reason. One pill can kill and we need to educate our young people that you don't need to be on drugs to have a good time at a concert.'

<https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/state-of-play-for-and-against-pill-testing>

3. Pill testing could encourage drug taking by giving potential users a false sense of security. It has been claimed that allowing pill testing to occur at festivals or elsewhere will send the message that taking drugs is safe. It is feared that this misleading message will encourage drug use among young people who otherwise might not experiment.

The Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, has noted that the state's police advised the government that pill testing would 'give people a false, and potentially fatal, sense of security about illicit drugs'. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/there-s-merit-in-a-pill-testing-trial-20190103-p50pg7.html> Similarly, Andrew Leibie, a scientist with Safework Laboratories and a member of the International Association of Forensic Toxicologists, has stated pill testing services could leave consumers with a false sense of security that the party drugs they buy may be safe, when this is not the case.

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2018/May/The_pros_and_cons_of_pill_testing

Victorian Deputy Police Commissioner, Rick Nugent, has stressed that the reassurance that potential drug users may take from pill testing is false. He has stated, 'Victoria Police is not

supportive of pill testing. There is no such thing as a safe illicit drug. An identical drug can affect different people in different ways. Illicit drugs affect people differently depending on the purity of the drug, tolerance level, or medical conditions that people may or may not know they have. The majority of overdoses at music festivals are caused by poly drug use – that is multiple drugs consumed by the person. Pill testing does not prevent this.'

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/pill-testing-it-gives-people-a-false-sense-of-security>

The same concern over giving potential drug users an unfounded sense of safety has been made by the New South Wales Health Minister, Brad Hazzard. Mr Hazzard has stated, 'Pill testing or 'drug checking' may test for the presence of particular compounds in a pill or capsule – it does not indicate that a pill or capsule is safe to consume. It gives people a false sense of security that may leave them brain damaged or physically disabled.

Focusing on pill testing and identifying the contaminants distracts from the fact that early toxicology tests indicate MDMA was present in the tablets consumed by all five people who died since September last year after attending music festivals.'

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/pill-testing-it-gives-people-a-false-sense-of-security>

The Tasmanian Health Minister, Michael Ferguson, has argued similarly, 'There is no safe use of any illicit drug and it's reckless to suggest otherwise. The idea that a testing service can indicate that an illegal drug is free of certain contaminants sends a very mixed and risky message.

There are serious concerns over how many lives could be lost by people taking an illegal and dangerous drug under a belief that it is safe, and some families who have lost loved ones are calling on Governments to reject testing for this reason.'

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/pill-testing-it-gives-people-a-false-sense-of-security>

4. Pill testing could encourage drug taking by creating the impression that drug use is officially condoned

Opponents of pill-testing argue that it could promote drug taking by creating the impression that governments and medical authorities endorse the practice. According to this line of argument, official prohibitions act as a warning against the banned behaviour. Critics fear that pill testing will remove that warning.

Australian Medical Association WA president, Omar Khorshid, has warned that no matter how much pill testing is marketed as not condoning drug use, the message could be that drug taking is acceptable.

Dr Khorshid has argued, 'Pill testing is not the magic bullet to prevent deaths of young people from drug overdoses at festivals, and there is a significant concern about sending a couple of wrong messages, including that taking these drugs is OK and we're not taking as hard a line on it.' <https://thewest.com.au/news/public-health/a-dose-of-reality-on-pill-testing-from-wa-doctors-ng-b881066978z>

In 2016, rejecting pleas that his government allow pill testing, former New South Wales premier, Mike Baird, argued that pill testing was effectively endorsing the illegal drug trade. Mr Baird stated, 'We are not going to be condoning in any way what illegal drug dealers are doing.' <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/pill-tests-support-illegal-drugs-baird>

Sydney Liberal councillor, Julie Passas, has argued that pill testing would only serve to encourage drug use and help dealers peddle their dangerous products. The councillor stated, 'What message are you sending out? We would be condoning drug taking to children and young people, and we would be aiding and abetting the manufacturers of illegal drugs and helping the drug dealers.' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/inner-west/councillor-louise-steer-remembers-sisters-death-from-drugs-in-pill-testing-debate/news-story/a3f80891de20dd981401713521423b12>

Drug Free Australia also argues that pill testing can present as official sanctioning of illegal drug taking. The organisation states, 'Pill Testing actually utterly undermines and is contrary to demand reduction. Pill testing... validates the pursuit... of illicit psychotropic toxins...[It declares] bring your illegally obtained and very harmful substances to a public event. We, approved by government, will test your poison to see if it is the poison you ordered, and if the contents of the drug complies with your agreed illegal purchase, then permit you to use this drug!' https://www.drugfree.org.au/images/pdf-files/library/piltesting/The_call_for_Pill_Testing_sadly_has_very_little_to_do_with_saving_lives_.pdf

Drug Free Australia summed up their position as absolute opposition to governments adopting any policy which could be interpreted as condoning drug use. They stated, 'The gate-keepers of health and well-being in our communities at a governance level are supposed to be politicians and policy makers, using the evidence-base and agreed upon strategies (i.e. National Drug Strategy) and interpreting it for reduction of, not permission for, drug use... Prevent don't promote!' https://www.drugfree.org.au/images/pdf-files/library/piltesting/The_call_for_Pill_Testing_sadly_has_very_little_to_do_with_saving_lives_.pdf

5. Illegal drug-taking is better treated as a law enforcement issue

Most Australian law enforcement agencies are not in favour of pill testing. Victoria Police, for example, is not supportive of the measure. Their view is that police strive to prevent people from distributing, accessing and taking drugs and that pill testing potentially undermines these efforts.

Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner, Rick Nugent, has stated, 'Police work hard to prevent people from accessing and taking drugs to prevent harm and prevent addiction. Pill testing occurs at the point when a person has already obtained illicit drugs and intends to consume them. More can be done to educate and prevent people from taking illicit drugs before we utilise pill testing. It requires responses from the health and education sectors as well as from Police.' <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/pill-testing-it-gives-people-a-false-sense-of-security>

Police Association Victoria secretary, Wayne Gatt, has similarly stated, 'There is much more to be done in enforcement, prevention and an increased focus on accountability of venue and festival operators.' <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/government-digs-in-on-opposition-to-pill-testing-trial-20190121-p50sqc.html>

A program of this type, with increased emphasis on holding festival operators responsible and punishing drug dealers, is being adopted in New South Wales. Changes are being made to the law to increase the regulatory obligations of festival organisers and the penalties that can be imposed upon drug dealers. From March 2019, festivals in New South Wales will be made to apply for a special liquor license requiring they be approved by the government, police, health officials and paramedics. Once approved, there will be scrutiny over the number of chill out zones and water stations at the festivals. Festival operators who skimp on medical staff, chill-out-zones and water stations will be fined up to \$44,000 for individuals and \$110,000 for corporations with potential jail time for organisers in the event of drug overdoses. <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/festival-owners-face-jail-time-and-big-fines-if-they-breach-new-guidelines/news-story/a70c6e1e643707ea997e0a397be68153> Police now have the powers to criminally charge owners if they break these conditions. A spokesperson for Racing Minister Paul Toole, has stated, 'As the new licence will fall under the NSW Liquor Act, festival organisers who fail to meet the new requirements will face the same tough penalties that currently apply for breaches of liquor licences. Festival organisers who do the wrong thing and breach conditions will also face being banned from running

future events.' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/festival-owners-face-jail-time-and-big-fines-if-they-breach-new-guidelines/news-story/a70c6e1e643707ea997e0a397be68153>

An expert panel has recommended that a new offence be introduced for drug dealers who sell deadly pills, as well as trialling on-the-spot fines instead of court attendance notices. The premier, Gladys Berejiklian, has stated, 'The Attorney-General and the police force will be working together ... we envisage it [the penalty] will be anywhere between grievous bodily harm, which is 10 years [maximum in prison], and manslaughter, which is 25 years [maximum in prison], so somewhere in that range.'

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/new-laws-to-hold-drug-dealers-responsible-for-nsw-music-festivals-deaths-20181023-p50bdk.html>

The panel that recommended these changes to the law (comprising NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller, NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant and Chair of the Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority Philip Crawford) did not consider pill testing.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/new-laws-to-hold-drug-dealers-responsible-for-nsw-music-festivals-deaths-20181023-p50bdk.html>

Further implications

The debate surrounding pill testing is an example of the persistent tension between the two conflicting positions of harm minimisation and prohibition that feature in Australia's policies for dealing with the sale and use of illegal drugs.

In the case of pill testing, the arguments of those opposed to the measure seem to rest substantially on a misrepresentation of the advantages that testing offers. Critics complain that pill testing does not supply any guarantee that the substances that are being tested will be safe to ingest. However, those conducting pill tests do not claim that their tests will ever indicate that a substance is safe to consume. In Australia's only sanctioned pill test trial, conducted in the Australian Capital Territory in April, 2018, participants having their drugs tested had to sign a waiver indicating that they were aware that whatever results the tests gave would be no guarantee that the substances were safe and that the testers bore no liability if the drugs caused harm. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/what-is-pill-testing-20190103-p50pg5.html>

Pill testing is quite literally a harm minimisation procedure. It seeks not to remove harm but to reduce it. Thus the tests are intended to warn of some of the hazards the substances being tested may present. These tests can never indicate that any drug will be completely harmless. As critics have noted, deaths are not only caused by contaminants in the drugs, deaths are often caused by the prohibited substances themselves. There is wide variability, for example, in the manner in which individuals react to drugs such as MDMA (the primary ingredient in ecstasy). What may be a harmless dose or concentration for one individual may prove toxic to another.

What seems vital in this debate is that exaggerated claims not be made by either side. Some proponents of pill testing, especially parents whose children have died after ingesting an illegal drug, have called for the measure in ways which suggest it would have prevented their son or daughter's death. One such mother has declared her belief that testing may have saved her son's life. She has stated, 'My son would have never, ever wanted to come out of that festival in a body bag. I think that if there was something available, it's a safety net.'

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-02/pill-testing-drug-man-dies-beyond-the-valley-festival-overdose/10677580> Such arguments are very misleading. If pill testing is regarded as a safety net it has to be accepted that it is one that is full of holes. It will save some young drug users from the adverse effects of some substances but not from those of others. It is not a guarantee.

It is also important that pill testing's possible benefits not be ignored because some of its opponents present arguments that are no longer valid. The criticisms made by toxicologist Andrew Leibie of the unreliability of onsite pill testing technologies used at music festivals have been used out of context. <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/pill-testing-sounds-like-a-great-idea-but-theres-a-catch-20170120-gtvlu4.html> Leibie's criticisms do not automatically apply to all testing methods used at festivals.

A background information document produced by the Library of the Australian Parliament said of Leibie's claims 'It should be noted that in his critique Leibie focuses on the limitations of colourimetric tests and other on-site test kits, in comparison to laboratory testing.

However, these limitations are well documented, and, according to Dr Monica Barratt, a researcher with NDARC, acknowledged by most pill testing services. Barratt argues that pill testing services only use such kits as their main tool when they don't have access to better technology. Fully-funded pill testing services typically use proper laboratory equipment, as was the case at the Groovin the Moo festival.'

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2018/May/The_pros_and_cons_of_pill_testing

It would appear that partial truths have been presented on both sides of this debate. Proper policy decisions will not be made unless there is careful consideration of accurate data.