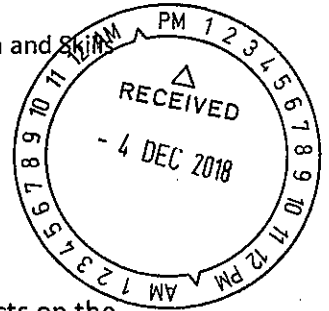




Meegan Fitzharris MLA

Minister for Health and Wellbeing
Minister for Higher Education
Minister for Medical and Health Research
Minister for Transport
Minister for Vocational Education and Skills
Member for Yerrabi



Hon Alison Xamon MLC
Chair
Select Committee into Alternate Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use and its Effects on the Community
Legislative Council Committee Office
4 Harvest Terrace
Parliament House
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Ms Xamon

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Select Committee Inquiry into Alternate Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use and its Effects on the Community.

The attached ACT Government submission has been prepared for the Committee's consideration. The submission addresses one of the harm minimisation initiatives that has been piloted in the ACT, namely the provision of a pill testing service at a music festival.

Should you require further information in relation to the attached submission, please contact Emily Harper, Director Preventive and Population Health, ACT Health Directorate, on (02) 6207 8634.

Yours sincerely

Meegan Fitzharris MLA
Minister for Health and Wellbeing

4/12/18

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ACT Government Submission

to the

Western Australian Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry into Alternative Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use and its Effects on the Community

November 2018

Pill Testing in the Australian Capital Territory

An Australia-first pilot of a pill testing service took place at the Groovin the Moo music festival at the University of Canberra campus on 29 April 2018.

The pill testing service was conducted by the Safety Testing and Advisory Service at Festivals and Events (STA-SAFE), a consortium of harm reduction advocates and non-government organisations led by Harm Reduction Australia that support harm reduction strategies in relation to drug use.

The ACT Government provided a supportive policy environment for pill testing to take place at the festival. STA-SAFE did not seek or receive government funding.

Pill testing is a harm reduction intervention that includes the chemical analysis of drugs surrendered by festival patrons, and the provision of relevant drug information and counselling by qualified personnel.

Pill testing facilities have been effectively used internationally since the 1990s and are currently available in approximately 20 countries in Europe, the Americas and New Zealand.

The ACT Government's Commitment to Harm Reduction

The ACT Government has not softened its approach to illicit drugs. It remains illegal to possess, manufacture and distribute illicit drugs.

The Government does not approve or condone illicit drug use. It is risky and dangerous to consume illicit drugs. The pill testing service provided this message to everyone who attended the service.

The ACT Government is committed to harm minimisation, in line with the National Drug Strategy 2017-2026. Harm reduction makes up one of the three pillars of the balanced harm minimisation approach outlined in the National Drug Strategy. Harm reduction includes measures aimed at reducing the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of drugs, for the user, their families and the wider community.

The Government considers that pill testing as a component of harm reduction measures is a sensible approach to limiting the dangers of illicit drug use at ACT music festivals.

Data and Evaluation

The pill testing pilot at the Canberra Groovin the Moo festival demonstrated that the service could be successfully conducted with the support of the venue owner, promoter, experts and volunteers conducting the service and government.

The STA-SAFE consortium (now known as Pill Testing Australia) have published a report on the pilot, available from the Harm Reduction Australia website:

<https://www.harmreductionaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Pill-Testing-Pilot-ACT-June-2018-Final-Report.pdf>

Future pill testing trials are intended to be subject to independent evaluation.

Some key information associated with the pilot is summarised below:

- 93% of patrons had used illicit drugs prior to this occasion (indicating the presence service did not encourage an increase in drug use)
- 30% of patrons indicated they would either not consume or reduce consumption of their pills, following their engagement with the service (evidence of reduced harm through reduced consumption of illicit drugs)
- 125 patrons out of 15,000 festival attendees accessed the service (similar to the use of services overseas)
- Of 85 samples submitted for testing, two substances responsible for overdoses and serious injury overseas were identified. Information on the presence of these substances in the ACT was able to be swiftly related to the ACT Ambulance Service, and the Chief Health Officer.
- ACT Policing were also able to use the service to test two 'orphan' samples obtained during the festival.