



A NEW APPROACH TO DRUGS

Keeping people safe and healthy

The law and order approach to drug use is not working. It's time for a new approach

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> A Pill Testing Trial

Young people are dying at parties and festivals because of drug use - and the law and order approach to stopping them is not working, and it's certainly not keeping them safe. Last year at music festivals in Australia the use of 'party drugs' caused the deaths of six young people, and injured many more. That is six young people too many.

To save lives and reduce the harms of drug use at festivals, the ACT Greens commit to introducing a festival 'pill testing' trial in the ACT in 2017.

Pill testing is already routine at festivals in several countries with successful results. It involves a simple, on-site test by medical experts, using portable laboratory-grade equipment, that allows festival-goers to have a pill or pill-scraping tested for toxic impurities that will harm or potentially kill them.

The law and order approach to drug use is not working. Illicit drugs can cause harm on their own, but they are also often adulterated with substances that can cause rapid and serious health impacts, and even death. It's our responsibility to do everything we can to keep young people safe - that means trialling pill testing in the ACT.

A pill testing trial will:

- » Give young people, and festival organisers, information immediately about any dangerous drug batches at events or festival sites;
- » Give health professionals and festival organisers the opportunity to engage with and educate young people who are planning to use drugs at events about the potential risks associated with their choices;
- » Allow for data about drug compositions and drug using behaviour to be collected to better inform our response to drug use and harm minimisation;
- » Provide police with additional data on illicit drugs (and impurities) that make their way into our communities to better identify and prevent the supply of these illicit substances.

“It is very difficult to respond to a problem when we don’t have the right information at the right time. Some people are unknowingly taking new drugs that as health professionals, we know very little about. Some people are taking pills with very high doses of well-known drugs like Ecstasy.

Testing these drugs at festivals and providing the results back to all stakeholders can really change the game. With this information at hand, police, health and welfare agencies that deal with the fallout from drugs are better equipped to do their jobs.

And there is strong evidence from UK and other countries that many people will discard drugs after receiving unexpected results from a credible service.

These services take particularly dangerous drug combinations out of the market while providing what can often be the only interaction with a health professional about drug use that a festival-attendee may have.

The evidence strongly supports conducting an Australian trial of testing drugs at festivals, so I commend the Greens on their pragmatic approach to this area of health policy.”

» Dr Monica Barratt, Research Fellow at the Drug Policy Modelling Program, UNSW

> A Drug Law Reform Summit

The social, financial and health costs associated with illicit drug use are a huge burden on every government. We know that that are many other jurisdictions that are responding to the challenges faced by drug use in new and innovative ways, testing the evidence base and seeking new research and law enforcement methods to address this complex issue.

Governments of all persuasions across Australia are wrestling with these complex social, legal and health issues, and our community cannot afford to be left behind.

As a small, progressive city state, we have opportunities to address these issues head on, and become a national leader in evidence-based Harm Minimisation.

The ACT Greens will hold a high-level, whole of government expert roundtable with input from leading law enforcement agencies, academics, and clinicians from around the world, to genuinely explore what’s working and what’s needed to have more intelligent approach to illicit drug use in the ACT.