

Drug Checking & Early Warning Systems Policy Statement



Summary

Drug checking, also known as pill testing, is a process that involves analysing a small sample of a person's drug to determine its composition and purity. This testing can be done at home using reagent testing kits or by professionals using forensic equipment at various locations, including mobile services at music festivals, fixed-site services, or through postal services. The drug-checking results are provided directly to service users, often accompanied by support and education. Results from these services can also feed into drug early warning systems, which can disseminate timely information directly to the public, enabling them to make decisions based on better information about what they might be taking. While drug checking is internationally recognised as a harm reduction strategy, currently there are no reliable ways for people who use drugs to have their drugs tested in Australia outside of the ACT, although QLD have recently committed to drug checking. Additionally, Australia still lacks a comprehensive national early warning system for drug alerts, and the existing early warning systems in some states and territories struggle to identify the nature and composition of substances quickly and before harm occurs.

Policy Demands

1. **People who use drugs, and peer organisations who represent service users, need to be centred in the design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation** of drug checking services and early warning systems.
2. **Fixed site** drug checking services should be provided in **central and accessible locations in all jurisdictions** in Australia.
3. **Fixed site** drug checking services should offer **drop-off points** in various locations in combination with **phone or online video follow-ups** as a possible means of increasing accessibility.
4. **Mobile/outreach** drug checking services should be provided in settings where drug use is expected, and where fixed site drug checking services may not be able to reach (e.g., at events, music festivals, rural/regional/remote locations).
5. **Postal/outreach** drug checking services should be integrated into fixed site drug checking services to provide options for **engagement for rural/regional communities, and people who are not able to access these services in person.**
6. The results from drug checking services need to be **integrated** into a nationwide, **publicly-accessible, early warning system.**
7. **Law enforcement** should **endorse and facilitate** the implementation of and access to early warnings and drug checking services and technologies.
8. **Law enforcement** should **actively participate in early warning systems** that share information with relevant services and the public.
9. Drug checking services should be **integrated with other services** to deliver **wrap-around care** that is able to deal with complex needs.
10. Drug checking services need to provide **exact and reliable information** on drugs using **laboratory-grade equipment.**
11. In the absence of widespread drug checking services, **reagent testing kits should be distributed and made accessible in all jurisdictions.**
12. **Reagent testing kits** should be available for students at all **university and TAFE campuses, free of charge.**
13. **Information shared** with the public should be distributed in a way that is **accessible and relevant to different communities.**
14. Early warning systems should make **all information** related to the drugs tested **publically available.**