



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Harm Reduction Australia Welcomes Pill Testing Announcement by ACT Government**

**Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017**

On behalf of our consortium partners, Harm Reduction Australia congratulates and thanks the ACT Government for today's decision to back the evidence and support a pill testing trial in the ACT.

It is a very significant advancement in Australian drug policy and demonstration of leadership by the ACT Government.

Some time ago the Safety Testing & Advisory Service at Festivals & Events (STA-SAFE) consortium provided a detailed proposal to the ACT Government on the trialling of pill testing in the ACT. We engaged in a number of confidential discussions with ACT Government Ministers and officials on the evidence and merits of our proposal and today we welcome the decision to allow the trial to proceed in November 2017 at the Spilt Milk festival.

It is a decision that will save lives and reduce harms for people in the ACT. It will also be a decision that is welcomed by the many families and friends of people attending the festival.

Pill testing programs currently operate in a number of countries including Austria, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and more recently in the UK and New Zealand; and similar to what has become evident in these overseas programs, the trial of pill testing in the ACT aims to deliver:

- ❖ Decreased number of overdoses and adverse reactions to drugs;
- ❖ Decreased consumption of drugs by those music festival patrons electing to have their substances tested;
- ❖ Increased safety and amenity for music festival patrons and their families;
- ❖ Reduced numbers at emergency departments and hospitals as a result of adverse drug reactions at the music festival;
- ❖ Increased the level of knowledge and awareness of drug issues amongst music festival patrons;
- ❖ Greater engagement of people using drugs with health professionals.

As well as many other positive outcomes.

In particular, the consortium would like to take this opportunity to thank the ACT Government, ACT Health, ACT Police and other ACT government and non-government agencies for their willingness to discuss the proposal and the evidence upon which it is based. Their contributions, as well as those of other key stakeholders in the ACT have been invaluable to the success of our proposal.

It is also important to acknowledge that our proposal and the its acceptance by the ACT Government has been built upon the hard work of many people across many organisations and sectors over many years. We are indebted to their sacrifice and dedication for making today's announcement possible.

The focus of the consortium between now and the November festival will be to work closely with our local partners and colleagues to successfully implement Australia's first trial of pill testing.

The STA-SAFE consortium members are:

- ❖ Australian Drug Observatory (Dr David Caldicott)
- ❖ Noffs Foundation (Det. Supt. (ret.) Frank Hansen, Prof Toni Makkai & Matt Noffs)
- ❖ DanceWize (Stephanie Tzanetis – Harm Reduction Victoria)
- ❖ Students for Sensible Drug Policies (Penny Hill)
- ❖ Harm Reduction Australia (Gino Vumbaca)

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Australia's first national harm reduction organisation for individuals committed to reducing the health, social and economic harms potentially associated with drug use