

A Statement from Harm Reduction Australia on the Tragic Death of Ms Sylvia Choi

Harm Reduction Australia is extremely saddened by the loss of yet another young life from drug use and extends its sympathies to Sylvia Choi's family and friends.

While most families would rather their members did not use drugs, they certainly would want this tragic outcome even less. We must do all we can to avoid this happening to others.

In response to this tragic loss of life, Harm Reduction Australia is calling on authorities to stop and rethink their current approach to policing drug use at music festivals.

The use of drug detection dogs, arrests and searches is actually causing greater harm as festival goers take increasingly greater risks to evade police and avoid detection.

It is time to manage the harm caused by drugs at these events in the same we manage alcohol use. We accept the reality that people will consume alcohol at events and venues and put in place strategies to reduce the harm caused by alcohol use to individuals and those around them. Let's accept the reality that drug use will occur at some events and manage the risk.

Authorities need to work with festival organisers, patrons and health experts to introduce measures that save lives and reduce risks. One of the measures that needs to be considered is pill testing. Many countries now allow patrons to have pills they have purchased be tested either on-site or off-site to identify the ingredients and any contaminants. Such programs can reduce the use of contaminated drugs and also provide the opportunity for health experts to interact with the people using the drugs.

No-one doubts that the intent of police and other officials is to try and save lives. However, their approach is only criminalising many young people for the rest of their lives and driving them to take potentially fatal risks.

As a community our longer-term goal must be to reduce the harm from drug use and this means looking at the evidence in a clear-eyed way and recognising effective policies that engage with people using drugs, not those that push them away.