

# From Sample to Signal

Harnessing information from drug checking to strengthen early warning systems

12 November 2025



**Christine Harvey**

Centre for Alcohol and  
Other Drugs  
NSW Ministry of Health

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This artwork symbolises a healing journey that is filled with reflection, hope and renewal.

Round meeting places represent our Country and communities.

Lines throughout the artwork depict flowing water which is vital to our health and wellbeing.

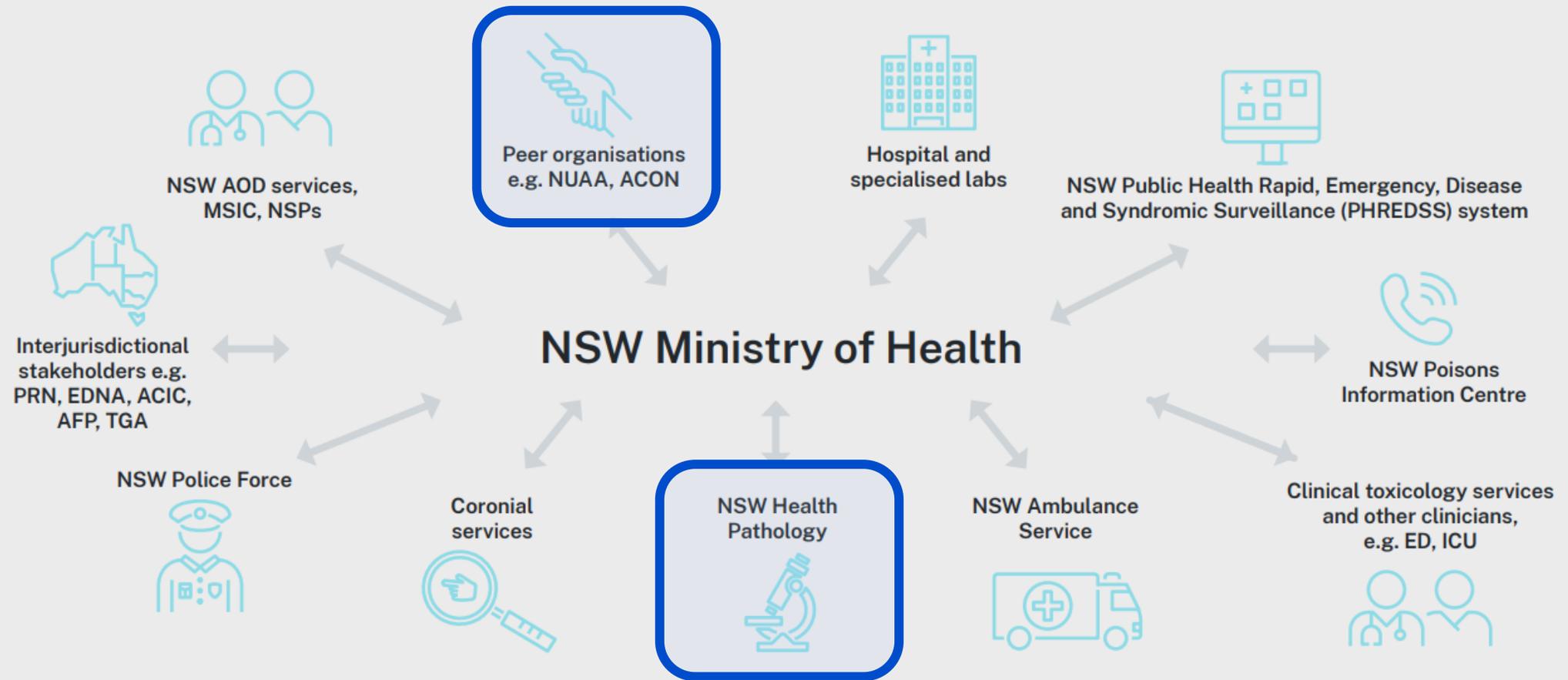
Calm yellow, blue and pink colours reflect the beautiful and peaceful nature of our ancestors. Browns symbolise Country and our connection to it.

“Our shared ground: Pathway of healing and connection”

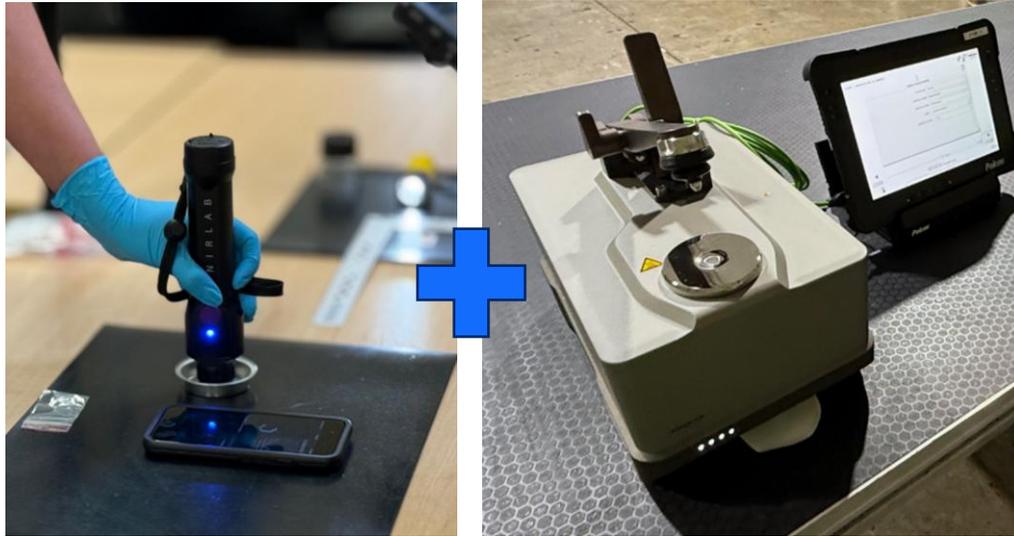


By Lakkari Pitt - a proud Gamilaroi Ularoi yinarr from Walgett

# NSW Government operates a drug surveillance and early warning system



# Data is available in near real time



Mix of technology onsite enables rapid assessment of:

- Main components
- Purity

Time in service (median) = 18 minutes



Confirmatory testing offsite **post** event, on GCMS

**Micro NIR (Near Infrared)**

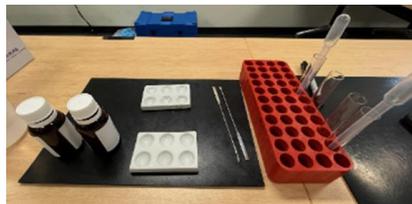
**FTIR (Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy)**



Colour spot test as indicated



Nitazene and fentanyl test strips as indicated



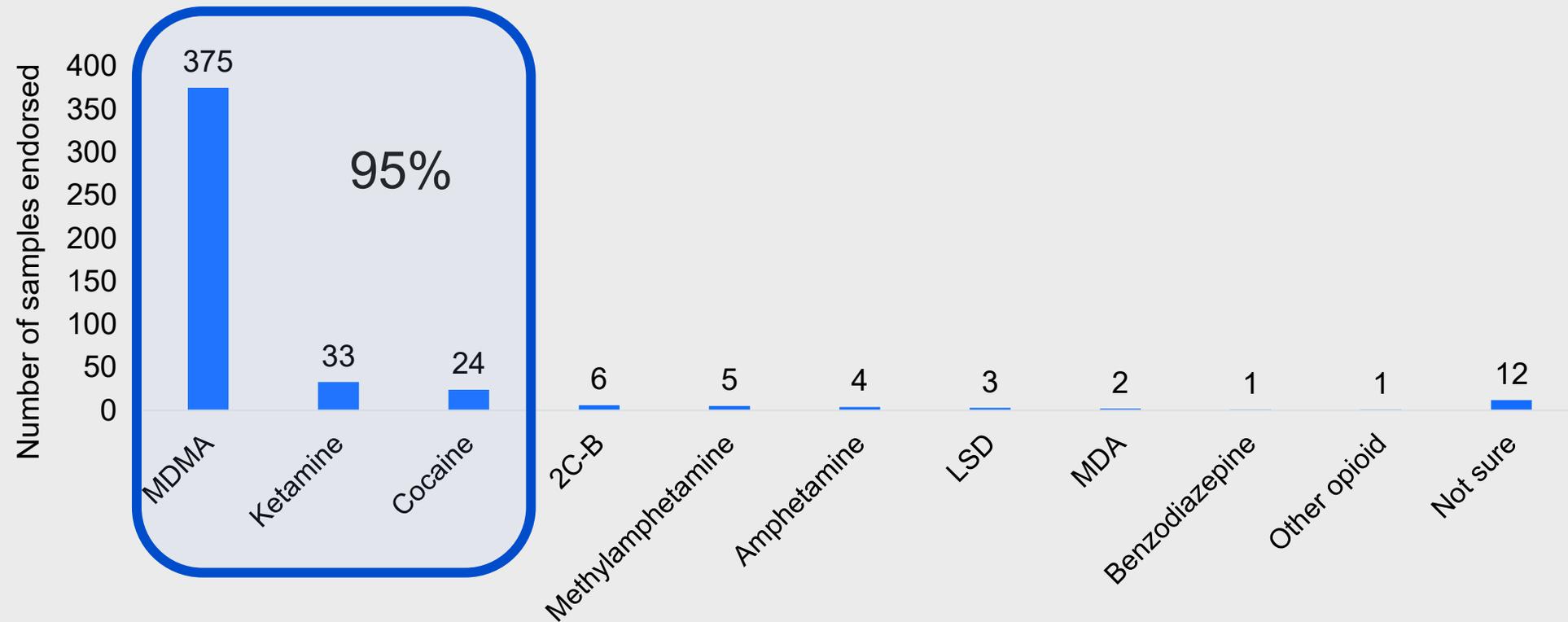
# Results from the service

How many people accessed the service and how many samples were tested?

	<b>Yours and Owls</b>	<b>Midnight Mafia</b>	<b>Hyperdome</b>	<b>Knockout</b>	<b>Total</b>
Date	1-2 March 2025	3 May 2025	7 June 2025	4 October 2025	-
Location	Wollongong (inner regional NSW)	Sydney Showground	Sydney Showground	Sydney Showground	-
Gate entries	25,000	22,000	10,000	60,000	-
Individuals attending service	103	163	91	318	675
Groups attending service	61	86	41	158	346
Samples tested	80	115	52	212	459

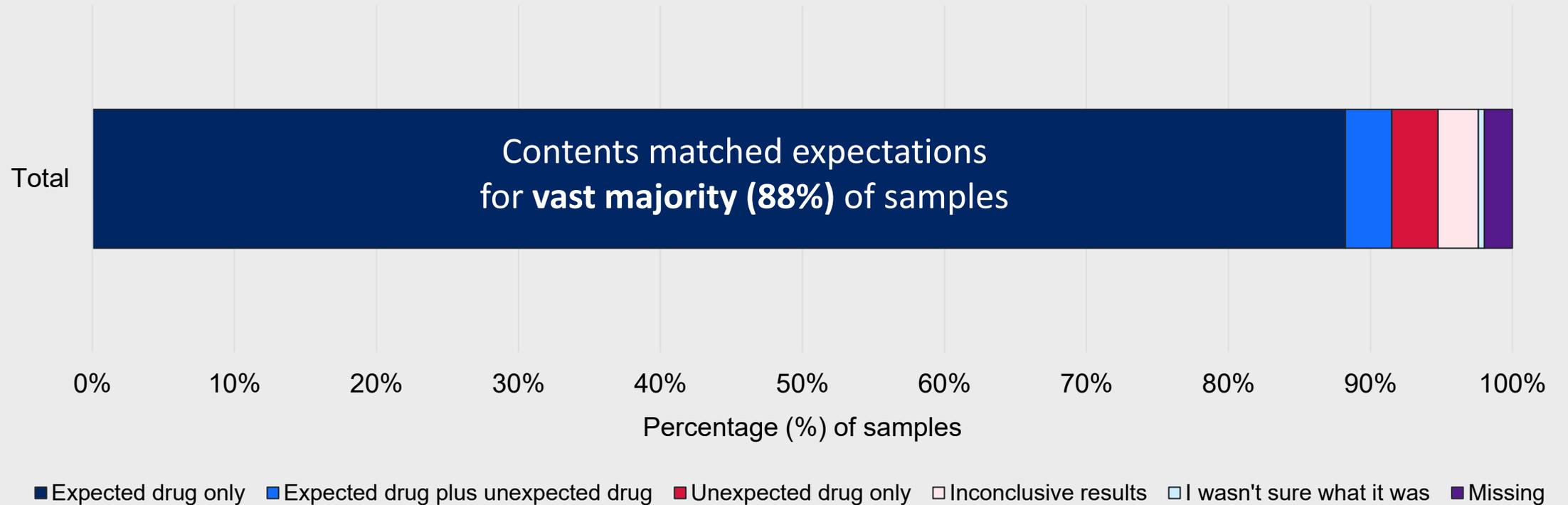
# Results from the service

What did service users bring in to be tested?



# Results from the service

## Did results match expectations?



# Fast results → Rapid risk Ax → Timely response

Identify

Assess

Respond

- **Type** of substance/s identified
- **Combination** of substances identified
- **Dose**
- **Unexpected** result
- **Uncommon** substance
- **Historical** data
- **Inconclusive** testing result
- Analyst **concern**



1. Analyst noted **historical** finding of NPS (including) nitazene in red bull tablets
2. Tablet **weight 0.688g**
3. Purity 38%
4. Dose 261mg MDMA salt (**220mg MDMA free base**)
5. Nitazene **test strip** negative

# Fast results → Rapid risk Ax → Timely response

Identify



Assess



Respond

Factors considered, include:

- **What** was detected
- Potential for **harm**
- **Environmental** factors
- Associated **medical or crowd care** presentations

Nitazene negative  
No known cases of harm in  
medical service at time  
(5:15pm)  
Cold evening  
One off tablet  
Previous finding well  
known

# Fast results → Rapid risk Ax → Timely response

## DRUG WARNING

Multiple high dose MDMA (ecstasy) tablets circulating in NSW

### Know the risks

- You are at **increased risk of harm** if you:
  - Take multiple MDMA (ecstasy) tablets or capsules
  - Take a higher-dose MDMA tablet or capsule
  - Use other stimulant drugs (e.g. amphetamines or cocaine) at the same time
  - Take MDMA in a hot environment like a music festival or indoor dance party
- MDMA (ecstasy) is often poorly manufactured and the amount of MDMA in a tablet or capsule can vary a lot, even within the same batch.
- The time from taking the drug to feeling any effect can vary significantly depending on the drug as well as the individual person. If it's not working, don't re-dose.
- High-dose MDMA use has been linked to death and other serious harms.

### Effects to look out for

- Feeling really hot and sweaty
- Racing heart/pulse or light-headedness
- Rigid muscles (e.g. difficulty walking), uncontrolled repetitive movements, seizures
- Confusion or agitation, feeling aggressive, difficult to rouse or unconscious
- Vomiting

If you or others experience these symptoms after taking MDMA, get help immediately.

### Getting help

If you or your friends see the warning signs of overdose:

Seek help immediately from your nearest emergency department or call **Triple Zero (000)**. You won't get into trouble for seeking medical care.

Start CPR if someone is not responsive.



Tablet appearance is not a reliable indicator of drug contents. Dose is reported as MDMA free base.

### Support and advice

For free and confidential advice:

- Call [Alcohol and Drug Information Service \(ADIS\)](#) on 1800 250 015 at any time 24/7. Start a [Web Chat](#) with an ADIS counsellor Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm.
- Call [NUAA](#) on 1800 644 413 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm) to speak to a peer or visit [NUAA](#) for a range of resources.
- Call the [NSW Poisons Information Centre](#) on 13 11 26 for information on adverse effects from drugs.
- Visit [Your Room](#) for fact sheets and other resources.

For up to date alerts, visit <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/drugalerts>  
Issued 6 May 2025 © NSW Health.  
SHPN (CAOD) 250430.



Assess



Respond

Immediate release of information not required for public  
Alert on site medical and crowd care  
Drug warning next business day

Information provided to service user

Other options include: Stakeholders

- On site public announcement
- Alert on site stakeholders (no public announcement)
- Defer for assessment and response post festival

# What's next?

- Drug checking trial will be **evaluated** by an independent evaluator
- We will continue to **finesse** our approach in the remaining festivals that are part of the trial
- We continue to **learn** from each other, and our service users, to help make the service the best that it can be, for our service users

