

Young adults want to #BeHeardNotHarmed: preferences for drug checking services

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Introduction: The availability of drug checking services is unequal across Australia, and numerous barriers to access have been found internationally. Young adults are consistently absent from drug policy and service design, despite being the largest demographic of people who use drugs. The community-led #BeHeardNotHarmed 2023 Survey facilitated data exchange with young adults who party and use drugs, addressing gaps in existing national and international evidence, and informing advocacy for health and harm reduction infrastructures, including drug checking services.

Method: 366 young adults completed the survey, which was promoted through SSDP Australia's #BeHeardNotHarmed campaign. The online survey ran from December 2022 to October 2023, and included questions around consumption, partying, and service access and preferences. Participants had a median age of 29 and the majority (91.0%) had used an illicit drug in the last year.

Results: If accessible and available, 85.5% of respondents would test their drugs at a drug checking service. Over half of respondents (52.5%) had never tested their substances, while 26% had personally tested their drugs. The main barriers to accessing drug checking services included service locations being hard to reach (72.1%), the fear of police presence (47.8%), and criminalisation (43.7%). Young adults underscored primary motivations for service access as concerns over health and the effects of adulterated drugs, and verifying the substance being used. Preferred methods of drug checking varied across settings, with respondents favouring fixed-site services before multi-day festivals, and personal testing kits for nightlife venues and parties.

Discussions: The findings from the #BeHeardNotHarmed 2023 Survey underscore the significant demand among young adults in Australia for drug checking services. Preferences for fixed-site drug checking services before festivals and personal kits before nightlife attendance suggests a need for an assemblage of context-specific drug checking services.

Implications for Practice or Policy: This survey highlights key service design features for the implementation and improvement of existing drug checking measures. Young adults who use drugs have been shown to value information regarding the harms associated with illicit

drugs and need a platform and appropriate support to help inform drug policy and service design.

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