

Drug checking up north: would festival patrons in the NT use this harm reduction service?

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Introduction: Music festivals present an opportunity for harm reduction, with drug checking being an intervention proven to prevent drug-related harms. Limited research on drug checking has been completed in Australia outside of major cities. We, therefore, aimed to understand support for and , prospective use of, drug checking among festival patrons in the Northern Territory (NT).

Method: We conducted a survey of n=539 music festival patrons in Darwin asking participants about their drug use, support for drug checking, and prospective use of services. In addition to descriptive analyses, we used logistic regression to explore associations between demographic characteristics and support/opposition for drug checking, and support for an onsite or offsite services.

Results: 73% of participants supported allowing people to test their drugs at designated sites. Among participants who indicated they would use a drug checking or testing service, 74% reported they would use an onsite service based at clubs or festivals and 72% reported they would use a fixed-site service. More participants reported they would use a drug checking service at the event where they planned to use the drugs (40%) compared to the days or weeks before the event (10%), which would necessitate a fixed site. Only education level was found to have a significant association with increased support for drug checking ($X^2(1) = 4.22, p = 0.04$).

Discussions and Conclusions: These findings indicate support in the NT for drug checking, an evidence-based harm reduction measure. Harm reduction is often overlooked in regional/rural areas, where there is less research focus on the needs and wellbeing of people who use drugs.

Implications for Practice or Policy: These data demonstrate that festival patrons in Northern Australia are supportive of and, receptive to, drug checking services. Findings indicate higher prospective use of onsite services compared to fixed site.

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