

Drug alerts are effective in increasing actions to protect against potential harms

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Background:

NUAA has supported NSW Public Drug Alerts since 2018. are active participants in the processes involved in the official alerts. We also issue the alerts under NUAA branding and offer tailored harm reduction responses to protect the community from overdose. NUAA facilitated- and led- interventions have included on-site announcements at music festivals and the supply of take-home naloxone (THN) an online NSP service. This paper describes some of the actions taken in response to alerts.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention:

NUAA issues accessible, low-literacy drug alerts via its social media channels including DanceWize NSW. Drug alerts can attract significant attention, with the reach depending on the substance focussed on in the alert. In the case of substances adulterated with opioids, the alerts draw attention to NUAA's postal THN service and encourages naloxone access. We have also collaborated on a live alert issued at a music festival.

Effectiveness:

There have been strong interest and measurable responses to drug alerts. Alerts concerned with MDMA and cocaine gain more notice and act as an effective call to action. Postal orders of naloxone typically increase following alerts with the largest response to date to an alert describing cocaine mixed with opioids with 41 naloxone orders filled within 7 days of the alert. Anecdotal evidence suggests a strong response to a live alert issued immediately following the detection of adulterated MDMA. Responses to alerts concerned with adulterated opioids are more muted.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

Drug Alerts issued by NSW Health are an effective harm reduction measure with people who use drugs taking active steps to reduce harms caused by an adulterated drug supply. A more effective, grass-roots, system for reaching opioid users is being developed by NUAA pending support from NSW Health.

Implications for Practice or Policy:

Consideration must be paid to those people who aren't being reached by drug alerts through targeted information to grass roots networks and increased buy-in from harm reduction services.

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