

## ***Going Viral, Ethically: Translating Drug Checking Results into Youth-Centred TikTok and Instagram Health Promotion***

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### **Background:**

For younger audiences, TikTok is not just a platform—it's a participatory culture shaped by algorithmic virality, audiovisual trends, and authentic peer storytelling. Public health and harm reduction services must meet young people where they are—both culturally and digitally. Drug checking services offer real-time insights into local drug markets, which can be leveraged for timely, platform-native health promotion.

### **Description of Model of Care/Intervention:**

Pill Testing Australia (PTA) developed a TikTok and Instagram strategy using real-time drug checking data to create engaging short-form video content. Designed with a digital cultural lens, the content employed trending sounds, collaborative posts with music festivals, and aesthetics rooted in pleasure, curiosity, and peer connection—hallmarks of TikTok communication.

### **Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:**

Co-posting on festival accounts increased reach by up to 400%, and several individual TikTok and Instagram posts reached over 35,000 users within 24 hours—far surpassing the visibility of traditional drug alerts, demonstrating how peer audiences engage with credible information when delivered by familiar and trusted cultural channels. A key consideration is how the cultural norms of platforms like TikTok align with the expectations of conventional AOD messaging. Risk-averse language and mandatory disclaimers can pose challenges to maintaining relatability and trust in youth-focused digital communication.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps:**

To be effective in brief digital encounters, AOD messaging must build connection, not caution. Starting from pleasure, curiosity, and honesty—rather than warning—allows us to meet young people where they are and increase service accessibility.

### **Implications for Practice or Policy:**

Harm reduction communications should reflect the culture of the platforms used. Funders and policymakers must enable messaging strategies that prioritise person-centred language, cultural resonance, and ethical virality—ensuring information travels far without compromising dignity or agency.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this project. This work was supported by Pill Testing Australia through in-kind contributions and festival partnerships.