

# DRUG CHECKING IN THE TOP END

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## BACKGROUND / AIMS:

In the context of Australian music festivals, including those in the Northern Territory (NT), drug-related harms persist. Despite being a debated harm reduction strategy, this study focused on gathering local insights into drug-related behaviours and attitudes, particularly regarding drug checking, among NT festival attendees.

Aims:

1. Understand current drug-related behaviours among festival attendees in the NT.
2. Understand attitudes towards drug checking.
3. Understand preferences regarding different drug checking delivery settings.

## METHODS:



In May 2022, we surveyed attendees (aged 16+) at a single-day multi-genre music festival in the NT about their drug use and harm reduction behaviours.



Surveys were anonymous and self-administered through Red Cap on a tablet or their own device. Participants received a \$5 Uber voucher for taking part. A follow up survey link was sent by text two days later. Results presented are from the first time point, onsite survey.

Questions explored:

- Drug and alcohol use practices
- Factors that influence festival safety
- Harm reduction strategies
- Attitudes towards drug checking
- Socio-demographics



## RESULTS:

Our sample N=539

Median age 25 IQR 21-30

68% Female 31% Male

67% Not currently studying 31% Currently studying

28% University undergraduate degree

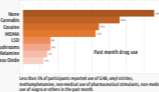
25% Year 12

21% TAFE, certificate or diploma

58% Ever used drugs

40% Used drugs in past month

13% Planned to use drugs at festival



Entire sample N=539

73% Supported or strongly supported drug checking

3% Opposed or strongly opposed drug checking

Pill testing onsite would make you feel 75% MORE SAFE and 15% LESS SAFE

+4% Use drugs but would not use a drug checking service

Participants who would use a drug checking service n=270

81% Would test drugs onsite (at festival or event) before drug consumption

19% Would test drugs in the days or weeks before an event

68% Would use both an onsite and offline drug checking service

11% Onsite service only 8% Offline service only

Participants who had ever used drugs n=315

81% Supported or strongly supported drug checking

3% Opposed or strongly opposed drug checking

• Logistic regression revealed age ( $p = .001$ ) and recent drug use ( $p = .006$ ) were significant predictors of drug checking attitude. All other variables of interest (socio-demographic) were not statistically significant.

• Holding all other variables constant, being in the older age bracket ( $>25$ ) was associated with 2.6 times higher odds ( $p = .001$ ) of being supportive of drug checking compared to the younger age bracket ( $<25$ ).

• Holding all other variables constant, having used drugs in past month was associated with 2.2 times higher odds ( $p = .006$ ) of being supportive of drug checking compared to those who haven't recently used drugs.

## CONCLUSIONS:

- The study reveals NT festivalgoers' widespread support for drug checking and suggests the need for on-site drug checking services in the NT.
- The large majority of the sample reported being supportive of drug checking services, irrespective of their own reported use of drugs.

Our sample included a substantial proportion of people who reported drug use, with approximately two in five reporting drug use in the past month. Cannabis, cocaine, and MDMA were the substances most commonly reported as being used in the past month. For those who had ever used drugs, an even greater support for drug checking was found. This is reflective of the music festival setting and in line with Day et al.'s (2018) findings, where over eighty percent of attendees in both samples held positive supportive views of drug checking as a harm reduction strategy.

The current sample displayed preference toward facilitating drug testing at designated locations, specifically on site at the festival. These preferences align with other research in festival settings (Barratt et al., 2018; Day et al., 2018), where a high percentage of individuals exhibited an intent to engage with drug checking services situated within festival premises.

The current findings add substantiation to the value which provision of drug checking services at festival venues may have on the potential to attract substantial uptake and utilisation. Even among those who did not report using drugs, support for drug checking was high, and only a small minority (17%) indicated they would feel less safe at a festival that offered drug checking.