What have we learned from five years of the Emerging Drugs Network of Australia, and how do we transition from a research-funded model to a sustainable toxicosurveillance system?

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Introduction: Since 2021, the Emerging Drugs Network of Australia (EDNA) has served as a prominent data source on illicit and emerging drugs, supported by five years of national research funding. We conducted a series of state-specific consultations with clinical and forensic laboratory collaborators to explore key learnings from EDNA's implementation, and priorities for a sustained national model.

Approach: Six state consultations were held between February-March 2026 to explore: (1) the benefits and challenges of EDNA's implementation in each respective state, and (2) perspectives on the transition beyond research funding. Thematic analysis of meeting transcripts was conducted.

Key Findings: Overarching themes included: (1) *Value* in early identification of illicit and emerging drugs of concern within and across jurisdictions and sectors; (2) *Sustainability* risks linked to i) current reliance on clinician goodwill for recruitment, data entry, interpretation and translation activities and ii) limited laboratory workforce capacity; and (3) *Transition* requirements beyond research funding, including health system integration, a simplified national minimum dataset and a governance model that supports jurisdictional variations.

Discussions and Conclusions: EDNA has detected 67 unique NPS across 519 NPS-positive presentations (827 total detections). 30 government-issued public drug alerts are directly attributed to EDNA or the expanded EDNA-Victoria network. Clinical and laboratory collaborators highlighted EDNA as a proven multi-state surveillance system capable of delivering actionable public health intelligence. However, future viability depends on dedicated funding for clinical coordination, laboratory testing and public health translation at state and federal levels.

Implications on practice and policy: Transitioning EDNA from a research project with demonstrated impact to an embedded national surveillance system requires formalised commitment by state/territory and federal governments. Without this, Australia's capacity to generate timely, objective evidence on illicit and emerging drugs causing harm in the community will become severely compromised, particularly in states without drug checking services.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: EDNA is funded by a 5-year National Health and Medical Research Council Ideas Grant (GNT2001107). Additional state government funding is provided by the Victorian Department of Health and the Mental Health Commission (WA) to support state-specific surveillance and early warning systems.
There are no conflicts of interest to declare.