INTRODUCTION
Pill testing has not previously been supported in Australia.

We describe the ACT Government-led process leading to an evidence-based pill testing service being piloted at a single day music festival.

PROCESS
A proposal for pill testing was submitted by an expert harm reduction consortium.

A literature review and consultation with technical experts, non-government and political stakeholders identified several key issues across four themes: public health, legal, law enforcement and reputational risk (Figure 1).

These issues were considered by a cross-government working group, led by the Health Directorate, and including justice, ambulance and police representatives. Community support was tested by a telephone survey.

MODEL
The final model centred on an enabling policy environment which supported delivery of the pilot by a third party organisation within the defined music festival.

The pill testing service was located within the festival health precinct. The health precinct location was an integral component of the operational plan.

Strong and consistent public health messaging addressed sensitivities and concerns on reputational risk.

DISCUSSION
The factors responsible for success can be presented using Moore’s strategic triangle for generating public value (Figure 2).

A critical success factor was the framing of pill testing as a harm-reducing health intervention.

The time required to undertake the literature search, assess community views, gain government and stakeholder support and implement operational components should not to be under-estimated.

An independent evaluation is recommended in future.

CONCLUSION
This pilot has fundamentally changed the harm reduction policy conversation in Australia, but it remains to be seen if this will lead to pill testing becoming standard practice at music festivals in the ACT and nationally.

Pill testing service requirements:
- trained staff
- appropriate pill testing equipment
- amnesty bin for safe disposal of drugs
- provision of information on risks of drug taking and limitations of pill testing to all patrons
- waiver to be initiated by patrons
- provision of testing results to first aid providers
- evaluation

Figure 1. Key Issues

Figure 2. Moore’s strategic triangle for generating public value

References