

SERVICE DELIVERY ABSTRACT TEMPLATE

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Keeping the kids safe: Australia's First Pill Testing Pilot

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Background: Pill testing, a harm reduction approach consistent with Australia's National Drug Strategy, has not previously been supported in Australia. This paper describes the ACT government-led process leading to the implementation of a pilot pill testing service at a single day music festival in April 2018.

Description of model of care/intervention:

A proposal was submitted by an expert harm reduction consortium. The ACT Government Health Directorate led a cross-government working group including justice, ambulance and police representatives. The agreed model was informed by: an evidence review; consideration of public health, legal and indemnity risks and benefits in the ACT context; and consultation with technical experts, non-government and political stakeholders. Community support was tested by a telephone survey.

Effectiveness: Strong ACT Government and cross-agency support was crucial to the development of a supportive policy environment for this pilot. A critical factor was the framing of pill testing as a harm-reducing health intervention. Considerable time was required to achieve a consensus through a combination of non-government led advocacy and government commitment. Several setbacks led to strengthened and timely engagement mechanisms with the land owner and the event manager.

Conclusion and next steps: Sustained political support, significant cross-government cooperation and a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy were necessary to implement this pilot. While this pilot has fundamentally changed the harm reduction policy conversation in Australia it remains to be seen if this will lead to pill testing becoming standard practice at future music festivals in the ACT and nationally.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *All authors are ACT Government Health employees. Government process led by PK.*

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