

THE FEASIBILITY OF USER-SUBMITTED DRUG OR PILL TESTING SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA

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Introduction and Aims: In Europe, 'drug checking' services, where people who use illicit drugs submit samples to determine their pharmacological composition, are commonly integrated into drug trend monitoring systems. In this study, we surveyed Australian nightlife and festival attendees to determine the feasibility and optimal design of a local user-submitted drug testing service.

Design and Methods: 771 Australian residents who reported use of illicit psychostimulants and/or psychedelic drugs and had attended licensed venues past midnight and/or festivals in the past year completed the anonymous web survey.

Results: The sample was 70% male, 29% female and 1% gender queer, and had a median age of 23 years (IQR 20-28, range 18-65). Only 18% reported being completely sure of the content of the drugs they use. Only 1% said they were not at all interested in using a drug testing or checking service. 94% would use this service at clubs or festivals, 84% would use a fixed-site service at a central location, and 52% would use a laboratory that accepted drug samples by mail. The majority (66%) would not use a testing service if results were only released in aggregate publicly. The possibility of arrest by police would deter almost the entire sample from using a service (94%). Surrendering a half or whole tablet would deter 45% of the sample, but almost all would use it if only a scraping was required (98%).

Discussions and Conclusions: Voluntary user-submitted drug testing is feasible in Australia under conditions of direct feedback and legal amnesty.

Implications for Practice or Policy: A drug testing service for Australia could improve real-time monitoring of emerging drug trends and provide opportunities to prevent harm from drug use through user and health worker education.

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