



Alcohol, Tobacco and other
Drugs Council Tasmania Inc.

MEDIA RELEASE

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Pill Testing needed to keep young Tasmanians safe.

The Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council of Tasmania is calling on all members of the Tasmanian House of Assembly to support the introduction of drug analysis services, also known as pill testing, into Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Greens are scheduled to table their Misuse of Drugs Amendment (Drug Analysis) Bill 2018 today, which will recommend that organisations delivering pill testing services at festivals and events are given immunity against charges of illegal drug possession, opening the door to the introduction of these services in Tasmania. The Bill will also recommend immunity to Tasmanians using drug analysis services and recommend the creation of a special advisory committee to provide advice to the Minister on drug analysis matters.

ATDC chief executive officer, Alison Lai said that their stance on introducing pill testing into Tasmania was clear.

“Everyone wants to see a reduction in the use and harm caused by illegal drugs in Tasmania,” Ms Lai said.

“Pill testing at festivals and events has been used internationally for over 25 years and it is well established that it not only saves lives, but reduces demand for illicit drugs and helps governments monitor in real-time what drugs are in the community to help them respond accordingly.

“It’s incredibly important that people understand that pill testing is an essential part of the strategy to tackle drugs in our community, and provides a critical intervention point where we can influence the harm of illicit drugs by providing an anonymous and confidential way for people to check the content of the drugs they’re about to take.”

Ms Lai said that pill testing could be introduced into Tasmania even if the Bill was not passed.

“We congratulate the Tasmanian Greens for taking the lead on this important issue and we support the Bill because we support pill testing,” she said.

“However, we’re acutely aware that there is unlikely to be support for it because of the misconception that pill testing encourages drug use, supports drug dealers and is counter-intuitive to the efforts of Tasmania Police.

“There’s a lot of work that needs to be done to work through people’s concerns, and while these perceptions exist we know that legislative change will be unlikely but what is immediately clear is that we must look seriously at it because community support for pill testing is rising at an unprecedented rate across Australia.”

The national momentum for the introduction of pill testing is being fuelled by an increase in illicit drug-related deaths at music festivals across Australia.

“It was only eight weeks ago that we lost two young Australians at the Defqon.1 music festival in Sydney, with another 13 people hospitalised and 700 people requiring medical support,” Ms Lai said.

“There were no professional pill testing services at this festival in comparison to Groovin’ the Moo held in the ACT in April this year where professional pill testing services were trialled with the support of the ACT Government.

“There were no deaths at this festival, but we know the risk was high because the pill testing service found drugs containing the deadly substance n-ethylpentylone, which has been linked to overdose deaths and mass-casualties overseas.”

Knowing that there is likely to be limited support for the Bill, Ms Lai said that the ATDC would be presenting an alternative option that could bring professional pill testing into Tasmania without legislative change.

“We’re going to be recommending the Tasmanian Government commit to convening a special working group to investigate the ACT Government model, where pill testing was delivered in a supportive policy environment without the need for legislative change,” she said.

“Their government was able to work through the same issues we have to strike the right balance and we must too.

“Despite the best efforts of Tasmania Police, drugs have been and will continue to make it into the hands of young Tasmanians at our events and taking the position that people should just say no to those drugs is unrealistic.”

The ATDC’s support for the Bill is echoed by Ben Bartl from Community Legal Centres Tasmania who says that we cannot arrest our way out of illicit drug use.

“All drug use should be treated as a health and not a criminal justice issue and we must recognise that the harms of illicit drugs can be minimised through education and on the ground programs such as pill testing,” Mr Bartl said.

The importance of pill testing for young people is also stressed by the Youth Network of Tasmania’s chief executive officer Tania Hunt.

“YNOT does not condone drug use but we acknowledge that some young people will choose to use illicit drugs,” Ms Hunt said.

“The introduction of pill testing, particularly at events where pills may be consumed such as music festivals, is likely to reduce drug-related harm and research conducted by the National Council on Drugs in 2013 suggests that young people 16-25 support the introduction of pill testing.”

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ATDC Media Contact: Alison Lai, Chief Executive Officer – 0450 517 017

Who are the ATDC? The Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Council is the peak body representing Tasmanian organisations providing alcohol, tobacco and other drug initiatives to reduce the harm of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in our community.