



MEDIA STATEMENT

Peak Body concerns on rise of misinformation to support drug checking positions

Friday, 22 November 2019

The Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council of Tasmania is highlighting their concern regarding a rise in misinformation to support particular positions on drug checking.

ATDC chief executive Alison Lai, said that their organisation is concerned by the level of inaccurate information that is being provided publicly and they are urging both sides of the debate to ensure that the information they are disseminating into the public domain is accurate.

"The ATDC acknowledges and respects that there are different perspectives on drug checking and we encourage active and thoughtful discussion across the community on this important matter," Ms Lai said.

"Everyone needs to form their own opinion, but we are very concerned by the misinformation that is being provided publicly.

"A recent example of this is a letter to the editor in The Mercury on Friday, 22 November titled 'Festival deaths are rare' where the writer of this letter made the claim that since drug checking was introduced in the United Kingdom, ecstasy deaths have doubled.

"The ATDC has serious concerns regarding the accuracy of claims such as this one, and we use this particular statement as an example of how information can be construed to promote a particular position.

"According to the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics, the number of deaths by drug poisoning where MDMA/ecstasy were mentioned on the death certificate have fluctuated from [51 deaths in 2001, to 8 in 2010](#), and we are aware that it spiked to 92 last year.

"The ATDC has spoken directly to The Loop, who deliver front-of-house drug checking services in the United Kingdom who have confirmed they delivered two trials of drug checking at music festivals in 2016, followed by three in 2017 and seven in 2018.

"The Loop have indicated that every year there are close to 900 music festivals of varying sizes across the United Kingdom and they question how an assertion could be made that trialing drug checking at such a small number of festivals could be the leading cause for an increase in ecstasy related deaths."

Ms Lai stressed that how information is presented to the community is very important.

"For example, one could pitch the alternative position that drug checking has led to a decrease in ecstasy use in the United Kingdom because according to the [European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction](#) 3.9 per cent of people aged between 16-34 years of age in the United Kingdom were reported as having used MDMA in 2016 and this figure decreased to 3.3 per cent in 2017," she said.

"Those advocating for the introduction of drug checking could make the assertion that this reduction is linked solely to the delivery of five drug checking trials in 2016 and 2017, and if they did our organisation would also tap them on the shoulder and ask them to not do this, because it represents an inaccurate interpretation of the information.



"The ATDC is fiercely committed to evidence based policy and practice, and we encourage people to reach out if they have any questions and this includes providing us with any new information they would like our organisation to consider.

"Our door is always open to receiving and reviewing new evidence as it becomes available, for or against drug checking.

"However, our current position remains the same that that there is sufficient evidence of the merits of trialing drug checking at Tasmanian music festivals and events.

"As this possibility continues to be discussed across the community, we encourage all members of the media and the general community, regardless of the perspective they hold on drug checking, to always carefully consider the content and source of information."

The ATDC's full position statement on drug checking can be viewed [here](#).

ATDC Media Contact: Alison Lai, CEO – 0450 517 017

Who are the ATDC? The Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council of Tasmania is the peak body representing and supporting community organisations, and the people they assist, to reduce alcohol, tobacco and other drug related harm for all Tasmanians.

Our vision is a Tasmania without alcohol, tobacco or other drug related harm or discrimination.

LANGUAGE MATTERS – Language is powerful, especially when discussing alcohol and other drugs and the people who use them. Stigmatising language reinforces negative stereotypes. "Person-centred" language focuses on the person, not their substance use.

When reporting on people who use alcohol and other drugs...	
Try this ↴	Not this ↴
Substance use, non-prescribed use	Abuse, misuse, problem use, non-compliant use
Person who uses drugs	Drug user, drug abuser
Person with a dependence on...	Addict, junkie, druggie, alcoholic
Person experiencing drug dependence	Suffering from addiction, has a drug habit
Person who has stopped using drugs	Clean, sober, drug-free
Person with lived experience of drug dependence	Ex-addict, former addict, used to be a...
Please see the attached Language matters resource attached or at: www.nada.org.au/resources/language-matters/	