

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Ambulance Services

Acting Minister for Mental Health

Acting Minister for Ageing

Acting Minister for Multicultural Affairs



Friday, 27 December 2024

PILL TESTING TRIAL BEGINS AT BEYOND THE VALLEY

Victoria's first mobile pill testing service is now ready to provide free and confidential health advice for festivalgoers this weekend at the *Beyond the Valley* music festival.

Acting Minister for Mental Health Mary-Anne Thomas today visited the festival site in Golden Plains Shire to see first-hand how the pill testing service will work when the festival begins on Saturday.

The mobile pill testing service will operate across the four days of the festival, between 1pm and 7pm, making it the largest-ever event in Australia to provide access to pill testing.

The Victorian pill service will be able to test at least 200 drug samples a day, more than any other pill testing service in Australia.

Demand for the service will be closely monitored, with additional expert staff rostered on to cater for any peaks in demand. Volunteers from DanceWize, the Labor Government-funded peer-based harm reduction service, will also be on hand to help patrons.

If a high-risk substance is detected at the festival, the pill testing service will work with *Beyond The Valley* management to issue rapid advice to festivalgoers, including through social media and festival signage. On-site medical teams will also be alerted to prepare for any presentations.

Pill testing will also enhance Victoria's existing drug surveillance capabilities. The Department of Health will use intelligence from the service to rapidly issue a statewide alert of a hazardous or unexpected substance, if evidence shows there is a sufficient public health risk.

Beyond The Valley also has extensive emergency management structures in place to manage risks including overdoses and high heat and humidity. The pill testing service is being delivered by an experienced consortium led by Youth Support and Advocacy Service, in partnership with The Loop Australia and Harm Reduction Victoria.

The trial follows the recent passing of the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024*, which made Victoria the first jurisdiction in Australia to have dedicated legislation to support pill testing.

The trial is just one of the health-led drug harm initiatives being delivered by the Labor Government, with the state's \$95 million Statewide Action Plan to reduce opiate drug deaths and harm now underway.

Quotes attributable to Acting Minister for Mental Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"We said we would deliver pill testing in Victoria and that's exactly what we've done."

"Pill testing is just one of many health initiatives we're introducing to reduce drug harm in our state – helping Victorians make safer and better-informed decisions."

Quote attributable to The Loop Australia Drug Checking Director Sarah Hiley

"Our drug checking service at Beyond the Valley will test the make-up of most substances, providing people with vital information, confidential health advice, and honest conversations to help them make safer choices."

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Quote attributable to Harm Reduction Victoria CEO Sione Crawford

“This important drug checking service at Beyond The Valley will prioritise peer-to-peer education alongside test results, shown to be the most effective way to reduce harm and prevent overdoses.”

Quote attributable to Untitled Group Director of Festivals & Major Events Pete Sofo

“Untitled Group has always prioritised community safety, and we're excited to add extra support at Beyond The Valley to help people understand the risks and make informed choices about drug use.”