

# 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



Thursday, 2 January 2025

## VICTORIA'S FIRST PILL TESTING TRIAL OFF TO A SUCCESSFUL START

Victoria's mobile pill testing service is off to a successful start with preliminary data and insights from the *Beyond the Valley* music festival confirming young people are eager for information that could keep them safe.

Acting Minister for Mental Health Mary-Anne Thomas today confirmed the free and confidential service spoke with more than 700 people – the majority in their late teens or early twenties – and tested more than 600 samples, with MDMA, ketamine and cocaine the common drugs presented for testing.

The service's harm reduction focus is already proving effective with preliminary data revealing nearly 40 per cent of festivalgoers said they would use a smaller amount of their drugs following a conversation with a healthcare worker as part of the testing process.

For more than 70 per cent of patrons, these conversations were the first time they had ever had an open, judgment-free discussion about drug and alcohol safety with a health professional.

The service regularly saw patrons with pre-existing medical conditions who had not considered how substances might interact with their health – often they visited the service to test substances, unaware of the potential risks specific to their conditions.

Testing sometimes revealed these substances were not what they thought – a crucial discovery for people with heart conditions, respiratory issues, or other health concerns.

On multiple occasions, patrons reconsidered their choices after understanding the potential consequences once speaking to the service's health workers.

The service also saw a significant number of festivalgoers keen to understand the interaction of recreational drugs with mental health conditions and prescription medications particularly antidepressants – many did not know that recreational drugs can interact dangerously with prescribed medications.

One example was a conversation with someone who had only recently started taking prescribed antidepressant medication and was considering taking MDMA – the health workers talked them through the potential risks and side effects if they chose to do that. The person said they would not use their drugs following this conversation.

Operated by The Loop and Harm Reduction Victoria in partnership with Youth Support and Advocacy Service – the service was able to test up to 200 drug samples a day, more than any other pill testing service in Australia.

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

### Quote attributable to Acting Minister for Mental Health Mary-Anne Thomas

*"These preliminary insights have already highlighted that what starts as a simple drug check often evolves into deeper conversations about health and wellbeing – a crucial step in our harm reduction approach."*

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**Quote attributable to The Loop Australia Drug Checking Director Sarah Hiley**

*“The response to Victoria's first drug checking service at Beyond the Valley has exceeded our expectations. Our expert team of chemists, healthcare workers and harm reduction specialists were able to engage with hundreds of young people in meaningful conversations about their health and safety.*”

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

*“Untitled Group and its festivals, including Beyond The Valley, have always worked hard to prioritise the health and safety of our community of attendees. The addition of the drug checking trial has been a valuable resource for festivalgoers, and we are proud to have facilitated this in collaboration with the Victorian Government, the Department of Health, YSAS, The Loop Australia, and Harm Reduction Victoria.”*