



30 January 2019

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Office of the Chief Health Officer  
NSW Ministry of Health  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Via Email: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

**Re: Consultation on NSW music festival safety guidelines**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the interim *Guidelines for Music Festival Event Organisers: Music Festival Harm Reduction* (interim guidelines).

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) connects, trains and educates over 25,000 medical specialists and trainee specialists from 33 different specialties across Australia and New Zealand. Our members have valuable expert knowledge and first-hand experience on this matter and include addiction medicine physicians and public health physicians. Our mission is to serve the health of all patients and broader communities where our members practice. This is accomplished through a focus on the provision of evidence-based best practice in all areas of medicine.

We note the operational nature of these interim guidelines which aim to “describe harm reduction strategies to support event organisers to deliver safe music festivals in NSW” and to “also support NSW Health staff and other government agencies to assess the planning documents produced by music festival event organisers when applying for relevant licences or authorisation to hold the event.”<sup>1</sup>

Harm minimisation has been a key focus of drug policy in Australia for many years and remains so under the [National Drug Strategy 2017-2026](#). We note that these interim guidelines have been developed following the release of the Expert Panel Report, [Keeping People Safe at Music Festivals](#), in October 2018. It is unfortunate that the terms of reference of this expert panel specifically excluded the issue of pill testing despite the fact that it was raised by numerous stakeholders as outlined in the Cover Letter of the report.

All harm minimisation measures available should be carefully considered and assessed to keep people as safe as possible at music festivals and elsewhere. The RACP’s Chapter of Addiction Medicine and Faculty of Public Health Medicine support carefully designed and

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Government (December 2018), Interim document – Guidelines for Music Festival Event Organisers: Music Festival Harm Reduction. Available online: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/aod/Pages/music-festival-harm-interim.aspx> [Accessed 21/01/2019]

evaluated pill testing trials and have urged all State and Territory governments to consult with medical experts to establish pill testing trials in their jurisdiction in an [Open Letter](#) published on 17 January 2019.

We support the harm minimisation measures proposed in these interim guidelines and believe they would be enhanced by a carefully designed and evaluated pill testing trial. One of the key safety issues in relation to illicit drug use at music festivals is that drug users are unaware of what substances may be contained within the drugs they have purchased. This, combined with other risk factors such as combining drugs with alcohol, heat and dehydration can increase the risk of accidental overdose or poisoning from unknown substances within the drug. This issue is currently not addressed within the interim guidelines.

We welcome the opportunity for our members to assist the New South Wales Government in developing harm minimisation measures for music festivals and offer our assistance in developing a pill testing trial should the NSW Government decide to implement one. We note that NSW has not had a comprehensive drug and alcohol strategy since 2010, and encourage the NSW Government to develop a new strategy that comprehensively addresses drug demand, supply and harm minimisation, in consultation with practicing clinical health professionals. We request that the NSW Government includes relevant medical specialists including addiction medicine physicians, public health medicine physicians and clinical pharmacologists and toxicologists in any advisory committee or panel that is established to advise on alcohol and other drugs at festivals and more broadly.

Should you require any further information about this matter, please contact Ms Veronica Le Nevez on [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Conjoint Professor Nicholas Lintzeris  
President-elect, Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine