



MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 12/07/2019

“WILL PILL TESTING INEVITABLY LEAD TO MORE DEATHS IN AUSTRALIA.”

“PUSH FOR PILL TESTING MISLEADING AND COULD BE AN EVEN GREATER THREAT TO THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OUR COMMUNITIES” – CEO of Rural Health Tasmania Robert Waterman said that whilst he is extremely concerned about Australia’s drug use statistics, he is more concerned about the misleading information and approach being used to push the “Pill Testing” agenda. MR Waterman said that the information being used to push the pill testing agenda is contrary to the evidence and facts. MR Waterman said he becomes extremely concerned when advocates for pill testing do so from a biased and misleading position. Mr. Waterman stated that Advocacy for any initiative should be honest, unbiased and truthful, not misleading. Mr. Waterman said that when individuals or groups use anything other than an honest, transparent and evidence based approach to push an agenda then something is very wrong indeed. People should be very cautious and get all the facts before supporting something as serious as pill testing considering the harms this can cause if the wrong decision is made.

MR Waterman said, there are no mysteries about party pill deaths in Australia. Almost all, according to the many Coroner’s reports, are from ecstasy itself and very few party pill deaths in Australia have been from unknown other drugs contained in ecstasy pills and this is contrary to the information circulating regarding pill testing. The only Australian study on ecstasy-related deaths mentions no Coroner-reported deaths from other contaminants or

impurities. Ecstasy overdose is rare, with most dying from MDMA used at normal recreational levels or in combination with other legal or illegal drugs. Many die because of something akin to an individual allergic reaction to MDMA. Pill testing's false sense of safety will only broaden the pool of MDMA initiates which could very well lead to many more users fighting for their lives in Australia. Pill testing is inadequate compared to ever-evolving substances potentially in party pills and pill testing will not deter the use of party pills.

European studies are being used to push the agenda based on claimed 'success' of pill testing but they fail to demonstrate or even measure reduced mortality.

Additionally, when asked by the "Not Even Once" initiative in schools and community seminars in Tasmania, Victoria and NSW this year before talking about ecstasy, three questions verbally asked were

What are you hearing about ecstasy these days in the media or amongst friends?

Answer - Pill Testing is always the response

What do you understand about pill testing?

Answer - It will test the pills to see if they are safe to take.

So if they are tested and told it's ok or they don't contain contaminants, what then?

Answer - It's safe to have them and nothing bad will happen to them.

Mr. Waterman stated that this speaks volumes in that young people already have a cultural view about pill testing that could likely lead to increased use. Mr. Waterman stated he is very concerned that there is likely another agenda behind the pill testing push – the normalisation and legalisation of illicit drugs in Australia. Here is some of the evidence the community should be aware of:

CENTRAL ISSUES REGARDING PILL TESTING

1. Pill testing rests on a false premise - that MDMA is relatively safe to consume if made commercially available in pharmaceutical-quality normal recreational doses, potentially causing very few deaths, whereas the available science on MDMA-related deaths in Australia indicates that it is normal recreational doses of MDMA which are mostly responsible for the hundreds of Australian deaths from party pills since 1995.
2. Pill testing is promoted with a false assertion - that impurities and contaminants in ecstasy pills, powders or caps are a major threat to lives in Australia, yet this heavily promoted assertion is not supported by the evidence.
3. Pill testing is promoted with another false assertion – that unknown other drugs mixed with MDMA cause many of the party pill deaths in Australia, yet there are only a handful of deaths from other drugs mixed with MDMA compared to the hundreds caused by MDMA itself.
4. Pill testing is promoted with a third false assertion - that rising purity in MDMA pills and caps is causing many overdoses, yet this assertion is not supported by the science.
5. With their emphasis on three false rationales, pill testing creates the illusion that normal recreational doses of pill tested MDMA is relatively safe, when in reality it is MDMA itself which causes almost all MDMA-related deaths in Australia.
6. The aura of acceptability and safety presented by pill testing will inevitably lead to a broader uptake of MDMA with an associated increase in deaths. This is implied by Australian surveys which record that 18% of

Australians do not use drugs because of fear of death (a fear which pill testing falsely seeks to largely remove) and 31% do not use because it is illegal (which pill testing compromises by co-opting law enforcement with the subsequent appearance of acceptability).

7. The majority of MDMA-related deaths in Australia are from polydrug use, where MDMA is consumed with other legal or illegal drugs, something for which pill testing cannot test.
8. MDMA also causes death by something akin to an individual allergic reaction, (a user such as Anna Wood died from a pill from the same batch used by four of her friends), something for which pill testing cannot test.
9. The majority of Australian party pill deaths are at home, something which pill testing cannot begin to address
10. Pill testing's assumption that a pill scraping or sample is representative of the whole is undermined by their own rhetoric which asserts that the homogeneity of pharmaceutical-quality MDMA would be much safer to use.
11. Because of the speed with which new and deadly drugs are synthesised, pill testing is likely to fail to identify some, again giving a false sense of security
12. The Bruker Alpha II used in the Canberra pill testing trial failed with the majority (53%) of the pills, powders and caps tested to adequately identify the major constituents, pointing to limitations of on-site versus laboratory testing with more sophisticated equipment.
13. The Bruker Alpha II used in the Canberra pill testing trial does not adequately determine MDMA purity, despite the (un-evidenced) claims of how important purity is.
14. The Bruker Alpha II used in the Canberra pill testing trial may well have not been able to identify the other drugs mixed with MDMA which caused the deaths of 3 Melbourne users in January 2017 because it fails to provide adequate identification where there is a 'cocktail' of drugs, as was the case with the Melbourne caps.
15. Claims that European studies show demonstrable success in saving lives is just as demonstrably false in that European studies rely entirely on subjective self-report attitudes and behaviours, and not on any objective measure.
16. The post-October 2018 rationale by pill testing advocates, that pill testing is a more effective way to tell users that MDMA is the cause of many deaths, as well as urging users to discard their MDMA pills, powders or caps, makes little sense. Why would anyone wait until they have spent their \$100 on a few pills to warn them of the dangers, which can be more easily achieved by a public information campaign using social media and the like?
17. Realistically weighing up the practical considerations of motivations for drug use, pill testing will not deter the use of party pills
18. Advocates for ecstasy previously maintained that deaths from ecstasy were few as compared to opiates, therefore it should gain societal acceptance. However there is a different calculus when it comes to festival deaths as compared to opiate overdoses, because decedents are so often very young, in the prime of life, and often relatively naïve in terms of drug use. It should be recognised that pill testing advocates have recognised this different calculus, and have ridden it to further their misleading cause.
19. The most central organisational push for pill testing comes from Harm Reduction Australia, which is also pushing for cannabis legalisation in Australia. Drug Free Australia questions as to whether their drug normalisation agendas have overwhelmed evidence and science in their promotion of pill testing.

20. The litmus test for pill testing is the meaning it represents to those who have not yet initiated ecstasy use. Given the hundreds of lives lost to MDMA over the last 25 years, the key question that must be asked is whether pill testing will be seen as a deterrent to MDMA use or an invitation. Drug Free Australia asserts that if a public opinion poll was taken today, the majority of Australians would position its appeal to greater safety as an invitation

References:

The evidence supporting each of these central issues nominated here is found in the attached pages.

Kindest Regards,

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Chief Executive Officer

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