Contact: Michael White

Executive Officer

Mob 0416176611

michael@sandas.org.au

www.sandas.org.au

Media Release

For immediate release – 19/02/2024

SANDAS Welcomes NSW Trial of Pill Testing

'South Australia lags behind in harm reduction strategies that are mainstream elsewhere', Michael White Executive Officer of the South Australian Network of Drug and Alcohol Services has said in response to today's announcement of a pill testing trial in NSW.

Pill testing (sometimes referred to as drug checking) services in other states are staffed by peer workers, health workers and analysts who clearly communicate the limitations of drug checking to festival goers. Illicit drugs remain illegal in in all these jurisdictions.

Pill testing is designed to help people make safer choices by connecting them with qualified health staff who can provide harm reduction advice. The free and anonymous services allow drug users to bring a small sample of substances they intend to consume to be analysed by qualified health staff. These substances are tested for purity, potency and adulterants. This can be done either at a festival or a fixed site service (usually located in the city centre in conjunction with a health service).

Where needed, staff at the service provide patrons with referral to health and welfare services available at the event or in the community. In these other jurisdictions research has consistently found that people provided with drug checking services are more likely to discard drugs that contain substances other than what they had expected, will take less of a drug and will engage with health workers about their use.

'As is the case in the ACT, Queensland, and Victoria where testing has been introduced, people would never be advised that a drug is safe to use. They'll be advised that all drug use carries risks, and that the only way to avoid this risk is to not consume drugs', said Michael.

'We want to make it clear that there will always be risks involved when consuming illicit substances and this should not be seen as an endorsement of illicit drug use. However, government has a responsibility to reduce the risk of harms members of the community. Pill Testing is a responsible reaction to the reality of community substance use. In the same way government seeks to reduce speeding, drink driving, smoking and vaping and other risk-taking behaviours', said Michael White.

'It is time for SA to protect the health and lives of those who take drugs and are exposed to risks, using an internationally recognised and proven health strategy that prevents death and harm consistent with other risk reduction interventions government provides. We call for a trial of both fixed site and festival testing as soon as possible in South Australia', Michael concluded.

###

The South Australian Network of Drug and Alcohol Services (SANDAS) works to enhance community wellbeing and reduce the harm associated with alcohol and drug use. We represent non-government organisations working in the alcohol and other drugs sector and provide independent advocacy and representation, workforce development, networking and policy support for our members.