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Media Release

For immediate release 19.12.2024

SANDAS Calls for Drug Checking in SA

The **South Australian Network of Drug and Alcohol Services (SANDAS) Inc)** has called on the South Australian government to introduce drug checking in South Australia in line with the decision announced in NSW today and the introduction of drug checking in Queensland, the ACT and Victoria. This would provide an important addition to our states long- standing commitment to reducing the harms associated with drug use.

Michael White, Executive Officer said, 'Following successful trials at Australian music festivals and fixed sites in the Eastern states such as the CanTEST Health and Drug Checking Service model in the ACT, SANDAS urges the State government to invest in drug checking initiatives to support a balanced and holistic approach to harm reduction as a matter of urgency'.

Michael also said, 'Drug checking should become a standard offering at all South Australian music festivals, with fixed sites in entertainment precincts, and mobile facilities that are able to attend events where drug use is likely to occur'.

Michael said 'SANDAS considers drug checking aligns with harm reduction principles consistent with Australia's National Drug Strategy by:

- reducing the immediate risk to users are by ensuring they are made aware of contaminates and approximate doses of active substances in the drugs tested in real time.
- expanding opportunities to provide drug awareness and harm reduction education, including addressing the risks associated with polydrug use, to those intending to use drugs.
- providing an `early warning system' by enabling the real-time identification of drugs in the marketplace and collation of data about drug use in South Australia and nationally.
- increasing drug users' awareness of the level of drug substitution and contamination in the drugs they have acquired. This information can change their purchasing and use patterns.'

Michael went on to say, 'There are great long-term harm minimisation benefits to be gained from drug checking including creating opportunities for skilled alcohol and other drug workers to provide people who intend to use drugs with immediate harm reduction interventions.'

Michael noted, 'The most common objection to introducing drug checking is the fear that the practice would increase drug use by normalising use and suggesting it is risk-free. In fact, international and Australian research shows that providing drug checking increases peoples awareness that taking any drugs can be dangerous. Drug checking regularly results in people discarding drugs or changing their behaviour because of their interaction with a drug checking service.'

Michael concluded that 'Drug checking services have the potential to save lives and reduce drug-related harms, including fatal overdose.'

The State and Territory Alcohol and Other Drug Peaks Network Position Statement on Drug Checking (including Pill Testing) provides a fully referenced discussion of these issues: https://sandas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/02012020-AOD_PN_PillTesting_DrugChecking_PosPaper_Final.pdf.

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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 the non-government organisations providing treatment, support, early intervention and prevention services to South Australians affected by alcohol and other drugs. We provide independent advocacy and representation, workforce development, networking and policy support for our members.