

MEDIA RELEASE

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Calls for permanent pill testing services amid opioid threat

Recent findings indicating the presence of extremely potent synthetic opioids in Australian wastewater for the first time emphasise the necessity of pill testing services for public health and safety.

"AMA Queensland is deeply concerned by the presence of protonitazene and etonitazepine in Australia," AMA Queensland President Dr Nick Yim said.

"The detection of these substances in wastewater suggests the product may have been disposed of there. However, the uncertainty about whether these substances were consumed by individuals first raises significant public health concerns.

"Even in tiny amounts these opioids can be fatal, posing significant risks to individuals.

"These alarming findings underscore the urgent need for harm reduction strategies, including permanent pill testing services.

"Pill testing allows individuals to verify the contents of substances before consumption, reducing the risk of accidental overdoses from unknown and potentially lethal elements.

"Many patients choose to dispose of substances after they've been tested.

"It also provides a life-saving opportunity for a health professional to talk to people about what's in their drugs and the risks involved.

"This brief but crucial interaction can be the difference between informed decision-making and a fatal overdose.

"This is even more important given we know people are purchasing unknown medicines online to try to make ends meet.

"Economic pressures can drive individuals to seek cheaper, unregulated alternatives, often unaware of the deadly risks involved.

"The rise of counterfeit pharmaceuticals containing highly potent synthetic opioids means that what appears to be a simple painkiller could contain substances up to 40 times stronger than fentanyl.

"Without regulated testing, users remain vulnerable to these hidden dangers.

"We continue to urge the Queensland Government to prioritise public health and reinstate pill testing services to combat the dangers posed by these emerging synthetic opioids.

"If pill testing can save even one life, it is money well spent – for families, parents, grandparents and loved ones in the community."

Background

- Since December, the *CheQpoint* pill testing service has seen five detections of the highly dangerous benzodiazepine bromazolam, and two detections of the deadly synthetic opioid nitazene, responsible for a wave of overdose deaths across the country.

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- Over the past twelve months, 490 people have accessed CheQpoint’s services, with 800 drug samples tested.
- One in ten samples contained an unexpected psychoactive drug, including highly dangerous ketamine variants, potent stimulants as well as deadly nitazenes.
- One in every seven people who accessed the service disposed of their drugs after talking with a health professional, and an additional one in three people were referred on for additional support including to their GP or to drug and alcohol counselling and treatment.