



Media Release

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Coroner calls for greater drug harm reduction guidance for music festival and event organisers in Victoria

Victorian coroner Ingrid Giles has today recommended that the Department of Health review its *Code of Practice for Running Safer Music Festivals and Events* following the death of a woman at a music festival in September 2023.

Trang Thi Thu Le, 28, collapsed, suffering seizures and cardiac arrest after consuming MDMA and ketamine at the electronic dance music (EDM) event, MarLo Altitude at John Cain Arena on 17 September 2023. She was initially treated onsite by St John Ambulance before being transferred to the Alfred Emergency and Trauma Centre where she later died.

In the finding, released for the first time today, Coroner Giles found that from 2000 to 2024 there were 18 overdose deaths – including the death of Trang Thi Thu Le – arising from drugs consumed at music festivals, EDM events and other similar music events in Victoria.

In reviewing the circumstances of these cases, Her Honour found that:

- the deceased were typically young adults, with an average age of 26 years
- MDMA consumption was implicated in 15 of the 18 deaths
- similar to the death of Trang Thi Thu Le, most deaths (10 out of the 18 cases) involved people who attended music events, experienced adverse events after using drugs, collapsed with loss of consciousness, event staff were alerted, and first aid and ambulance responders were ultimately unable to revive them.

To understand the context of these deaths and identify opportunities for prevention, Coroner Giles reviewed Australian and International research focused on drug use at music events. Her Honour noted the research consistently showed that harm reduction initiatives and strategies were crucial to keep people safe at these events.

“A common thread throughout research is that countermeasures designed exclusively to prevent people using drugs (for example police, security guards, bag searches, sniffer dogs, higher penalties for drug possession) have no positive impact on drug use or related harms, and in some cases can actually lead to riskier drug use and greater drug harms,” said Her Honour.

This was echoed in the submissions to the coroner from Harm Reduction Victoria, expressing concern that practices at some events in Victoria, such as regular checks by staff looking for signs of drug use in the toilets, prohibiting people from bringing in water, long lines to access water, random ‘pat down’ searches of attendees, and security-led responses to people who may be experiencing the effects of drugs, may contribute to mistrust and fear among attendees; and this in turn may contribute to riskier drug-taking behaviours such as dangerously pre-loading drugs before attending the event.

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Coroner Giles did not make any adverse findings in relation to the management of the MarLo Altitude event. However, reflecting upon Trang Thi Thu Le's death in the context of other similar Victorian deaths as well as Harm Reduction Victoria's submission, the evidence of witnesses including Dr Martin Dutch who led the initial medical treatment at the event, and recent Victorian drug harm reduction developments such as initiating a drug checking ('pill testing') trial, Coroner Giles determined that there may be a need to critically examine what guidance is currently available to music event organisers about how to run safe events.

Presently, the main Victorian government safety guidance for music event organisers is the Department of Health's *Code of practice for running safer music festivals and events* – which has not been updated since 2013.

Coroner Giles commented that government has a responsibility to provide an overarching harm reduction framework, and that improved guidance from the Victorian Department of Health has the potential to *"assist music event organisers in understanding and implementing measures intended to reduce drug-related harms and to provide greater certainty for members of the public about the way in which such events will be run."*

To reduce preventable deaths and improve public health and safety, Coroner Giles has recommended: *"That the Victorian Department of Health consult with relevant drug harm reduction and clinical experts to review and refresh the contents of the Code of practice for running safer music festivals and events, to ensure its guidance on drug harm reduction at music festivals and electronic dance music events reflects current evidence and best practice."*

In the finding, Her Honour also commended the drug checking trial currently underway in Victoria as a vital part of the state's overall harm reduction strategy.

"I am optimistic that the Victorian Pill Testing Service will support Victorians to make more informed and safer choices about using drugs from the unregulated drug market – whether in pill form or otherwise - which may in turn to lead to a reduction in the number of preventable deaths," said Her Honour. *"I encourage the Victorian Department of Health to continue its efforts in ensuring such services are available to young people attending EDM events, who may be at a higher risk of experiencing drug-related harms."*

A copy of the finding can be accessed here: [Finding into the death of Trang Thi Thu Le](#)

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