

11 November 2024

House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Via email [Health.Reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:Health.Reps@aph.gov.au)

To the Committee Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into the health impacts of alcohol and other drugs in Australia

I am writing on behalf of the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) to respond to a question taken on notice during the House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport hearing on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October:

1) (Page 16) CHAIR: I think you mentioned pill testing.

Mr Taylor: Yes, drug checking. That is right.

Dr Lalor: The early warning systems are really important. You can collect data about the new drugs. There are new substances coming in all the time. Nitazenes and fentanyl are the two we talk about because I can say those words. There are some very long words with lots of numbers in them that completely mystify me. There are many experts who can talk to you about that.

**CHAIR: Is there any way that you could, on notice, put something together about what new inquiries you are seeing?**

Dr Lalor: Yes, we can.

This response relates to trends in emerging drugs of concern, such as potent synthetic opioids (PSOs) like nitazenes and fentanyl, that are being identified in the Australian drug market. As outlined in our submission, the changes to the drug supply have significant impacts on the health and social outcomes of people who use drugs. There is significant concern regarding adulterants in the drug supply, particularly potent synthetic opioids like fentanyl and nitazenes. Over the past 3 years, nitazenes have been detected across Australia and have been linked to several overdose deaths in Victoria, NSW and South Australia.

In the past 12 months, the ADF's Drug Facts web page on nitazenes has had 129,000 views, peaking at the end of June 2024 in line with media coverage of the 4 overdose deaths reported in Broadmeadows, Victoria on 25 June. We saw a sharp increase in Australian traffic from Google searches in response to the overdose events, with a 2700% increase compared to the previous week. There has also been a 167% increase in overall worldwide traffic to the page compared to the previous quarter, suggesting

Level 12  
607 Bourke Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

PO Box 818  
North Melbourne  
VIC 3051

-  
 03 9611 6100  
 [adf@adf.org.au](mailto:adf@adf.org.au)  
[adf.org.au](http://adf.org.au) ABN 66 057 731 192

that there is increasing interest from the community in information on potent synthetic opioids. The [nitazenes Drug Facts page](#) provides information about what nitazenes are, short- and long-term effects, how to recognise signs of an overdose and ways to reduce harm.

Available drug checking services and drug surveillance networks across the country have been essential to detecting and responding to detections of other adulterants. The ACT service, CanTEST, has been open since July 2022, and has analysed more than 2,900 samples. The service has detected 252 novel psychoactive substances, the most common of which include 2'-fluoro-2-oxo-PCE (dissociative effects), dipentylone (stimulant effects), tiletamine and ketamine (both dissociative anaesthetics). Ketamine is classified as novel psychoactive substance as it is not subject to international control on the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). The CanTEST service has also released 20 community notices advising of dangerous substances that have been detected in the drug supply.<sup>1</sup>

Since July 2024, the ADF has shared publicly available drug alerts from across jurisdictions via the ADF website. To date, there have been more than 6,000 clicks through to the National Centre for Clinical Research on Emerging Drug's (NCCRED) [The Know project](#). This is a website where drug alerts and advisories are collated from government and community organisations in each jurisdiction, to provide a national overview of emerging drugs of concern.

There is a need for a sustained, coordinated and comprehensive approach to drug surveillance across Australia. A coordinated early warning system (EWS) will enable high quality data collection that will allow government and non-government organisations and researchers to rapidly respond to emerging drug harm in an effective manner. The ADF therefore recommends that the federal government take a leadership role in establishing or coordinating a national EWS and develops systems that ensure up to date evidence on effective, evidence-based responses to drug-related harm.

Ensuring access to up-to-date information about drugs is also important. The ADF's information services provide evidence-based information to the wider public. In addition to targeted information provision to those more at risk of harm from emerging substances of concern in the drug supply, this can serve as a protective factor and assist in people's literacy with future alerts and awareness of risks.

Sincerely,

**Dr Erin Lalor**

CEO

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E [erin.lalor@adf.org.au](mailto:erin.lalor@adf.org.au)

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## References

1. CanTEST Health & Drug Checking Service. CanTEST Two-Year Report 2023-24. Canberra: CanTEST; 2024. Available from: <https://cantest.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CanTEST-Two-Year-Report-2023-24.pdf>.