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## Queensland politics

# Queensland government to ban pill testing in move criticised by health advocates

Liberal National party expected to legislate ban this week, putting an end to testing of illicit drugs at festivals

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## Andrew Messenger

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Queensland's state government is expected to ban pill testing, including at festivals, by attaching amendments to an unrelated bill in parliament in a move criticised by health advocates.

Under the previous Labor government, Queensland was the first state to establish a fixed pill-testing strategy on an ongoing basis, in 2024. Clinics were opened on the Gold Coast and in Brisbane.

The Liberal National party closed them upon taking government last October, as promised before the election, by cutting their public funding.

But festival-based pill testing services continued to operate in Queensland.

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The state government will legislate this week to ban Pill Testing Australia and the Loop Australia from operating.

The LNP is expected to amend the health legislation amendment bill, an unrelated omnibus bill, to include the ban.

Because Queensland has only a single house of parliament, the bill is certain to pass into law so long as all government members vote for it.

Guardian Australia understands the opposition leader, Steven Miles, will direct Labor MPs to call for an inquiry into pill testing when a health committee meets at Queensland parliament on Wednesday.


The LNP government has repeatedly said that it opposes fixed and festival pill testing in recent weeks, but its plan to ban them this week has not been previously reported.

“There is no safe illicit substance. That’s why they’re illegal,” the deputy premier, Jarrod Bleijie, said earlier this month, the Courier Mail reported.

“That’s why the government is taking a zero-tolerance approach to privately funded or publicly funded pill-testing facilities.”

Australian Medical Association Queensland president, Dr Nick Yim, said the body had been “firm in its support for pill testing, which minimises harm by identifying unexpected and potentially dangerous substances in the community”.

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“If the Queensland government has evidence to show that pill testing is harmful, we urge them to release it so the whole community can evaluate the data,” he said.

“Pill testing is not just about testing. It provides an opportunity for individuals to be educated with a healthcare professional.”

Yim said pill testing can be life saving “by giving patients information and treatment pathways to help them make alternative choices”.

The University of Queensland was commissioned to independently evaluate Queensland’s pill testing scheme by the former Labor government. The LNP government has blocked its release through right to information laws on the basis that it is a cabinet document, effectively keeping its findings secret.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) called for the evaluation to be released earlier this year.

“Let this evaluation see the light of day,” RACGP Queensland chair, Dr Cathryn Hester said in June.

“We have evidence from other jurisdictions around the world that drug testing is a sensible harm-reduction measure.

“If the government was confident its decision to close the drug-testing sites was based on the best available evidence, this evaluation would be made public.”

Health minister Tim Nicholls was contacted for comment.

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