

Slow Italian, Fast Learning

Ep.443: NSW makes pill testing at festivals permanent. Some say it isn't enough

Italian	English
Per la cittadina di Sydney Jennie Ross-King, il percorso per cambiare le leggi sulle droghe nel suo Stato è stato lungo e doloroso. "One that began with the loss of my beautiful daughter Alex, and one that I would give anything not to have happened." Alex, 19 anni, è morta per un'overdose di MDMA durante un festival musicale nel 2019. Da allora, Jennie porta avanti una campagna a favore della riforma delle leggi sulle droghe. Ora, da quest'estate, una delle misure che chiedeva da tempo, il pill testing o analisi delle sostanze, diventerà permanente in un massimo di 15 festival musicali del NSW. Una decisione che ha anche un significato personale per il ministro della Sanità Ryan Park. "I'm the dad of a 16-year-old and a 12-year-old. These are conversations that I'm having right now in my own family. And many families are right across New South Wales." L'introduzione permanente del programma arriva dopo una sperimentazione di un anno condotta dal governo statale e dopo la pubblicazione di un rapporto che ha concluso che il servizio riduce efficacemente i rischi associati al consumo di droghe illegali durante i festival. La deputata di Summer Hill, Jo Haylen, ha detto che la decisione è supportata dalle evidenze raccolte.	For Sydney woman Jennie Ross-King, the path to changing drug laws in her home state has been a long and painful journey. "One that began with the loss of my beautiful daughter Alex, and one that I would give anything not to have happened." 19-year-old Alex died from an MDMA overdose at a music festival in 2019 - and Jennie has campaigned for drug law reform ever since. Now, from this summer, one of the measures she's been asking for - pill testing - will be made a permanent feature of up to 15 music festivals in New South Wales - a decision that is also deeply personal for Health Minister Ryan Park. "I'm the dad of a 16-year-old and a 12-year-old. These are conversations that I'm having right now in my own family. And many families are right across New South Wales." The permanent introduction of the scheme follows a successful year-long state government trial, and a report that found the service effectively reduced harms associated with illicit drug taking at festivals. Summer Hill MP Jo Haylen says the decision is backed by evidence.

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"I'm so proud to be a part of a government that held the first drug summit in a quarter of a century. We gathered together experts, academics. We gathered together people who have spent a lifetime considering these really complex issues. And we listened to them. And our co-chairs - Carmel Tebbutt and John Brogden - provided recommendations to government."

Il ministero della Sanità del NSW inizierà ora a consultare il settore della musica e le organizzazioni che si occupano di riduzione del danno per decidere quali festival parteciperanno al programma.

L'opposizione statale, però, non condivide la scelta. La leader dei Liberali, Kellie Sloane, ritiene che il provvedimento trasmetta il messaggio sbagliato.

"As a mum I have to say I've been conflicted over this. I don't want my kids - I want anything for my kids to have that one last stop that would prevent them from taking a drug. But we need to be very serious about the bigger message that this sends, a message around permissiveness, a message that the government isn't being the grownup. And I'm concerned that that will ultimately cost more lives."

Ryan Park ha ribadito che rendere permanente il pill testing non significa legittimare il consumo di droghe.

Secondo il ministro, questi servizi offrono ai giovani uno spazio sicuro per riflettere sulle proprie scelte e confrontarsi con operatori sanitari.

Park ha spiegato che il rapporto sulla sperimentazione ha mostrato come molti ragazzi abbiano cambiato programma dopo aver scoperto che le sostanze in loro

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New South Wales Health will now begin consulting the music industry and harm reduction organisations to choose which festivals will take part in the program.

But the state opposition is not happy - liberal party leader Kellie Sloane, declaring it sends the wrong message.

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Ryan Park says making pill testing permanent isn't about legitimising drug use.

He says pill testing services give young people a safe space to talk about their choices.

The New South Wales Health Minister says the report found many young people changed their plans after finding out the pills



possesso contenevano MDMA, ketamina o altri composti diversi da quelli che credevano di assumere. "Of those people, of that ten percent or that component, what we then found was 75 percent of those people said that they would either discharge or change their behaviour in relation to that. Now that again is harm reduction working the way it should." Gli esperti sostengono inoltre che l'analisi delle sostanze permetta di individuare droghe particolarmente pericolose presenti sul mercato, fornendo informazioni utili sia alla ricerca sia ai servizi sanitari. Il ministro Park ha detto che i risultati della sperimentazione dimostrano quanto sia importante monitorare ciò che i giovani assumono durante gli eventi musicali. "Eight percent of substances that we checked were not what the person thought they were. That's close to one in ten." Altri, però, ritengono che la misura non sia sufficiente. L'organizzazione per la riforma delle leggi sulle droghe Unharm chiede che il pill testing venga esteso anche oltre i festival musicali. Il direttore esecutivo Will Tregoning ha sottolineato che circa tre quarti dei decessi legati all'MDMA avvengono in abitazioni private, mentre soltanto il sette per cento si verifica durante festival o feste. Questa richiesta è stata condivisa da Alice Salomon della Uniting Church e dalla deputata dei Verdi Cate Faehrmann, che da anni evidenzia come sostanze estremamente pericolose vengano sempre più spesso rinvenute in droghe diffuse come cocaina, ketamina, metanfetamina e MDMA.	contained elements like MDMA or ketamine, contrary to what they believed. "Of those people, of that ten percent or that component, what we then found was 75 percent of those people said that they would either discharge or change their behaviour in relation to that. Now that again is harm reduction working the way it should." Experts also argue pill testing helps to detect potentially dangerous drugs circulating in the marketplace, information that can help inform health services and research. Minister Park says the report on the 12-month pill testing trial showed there is plenty of reason to worry about what young people are taking at music festivals. "Eight percent of substances that we checked were not what the person thought they were. That's close to one in ten." Meanwhile, others say the measure doesn't go far enough. Drug law reform organisation, Unharm, wants pill testing to be extended beyond music festivals, with chief executive Will Tregoning saying that roughly three quarters of MDMA-related deaths occurred at private residences, and only seven per cent at festivals or dance parties. His call has been echoed by Uniting Church advocacy director Alice Salomon, and Greens MP Cate Faehrmann, who has long argued that highly dangerous substances have been increasingly found in common street drugs like cocaine, ketamine, methamphetamine and MDMA.
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"To be honest, this is literally the bare minimum. Overdoses have been increasing. Drug presentations to emergency departments have been increasing." I programmi di pill testing sono già disponibili a Canberra e in Victoria, dove esistono anche servizi mobili durante alcuni eventi, ma situazione è invece diversa in altri Stati. South Australia, Western Australia e Tasmania hanno escluso l'introduzione di programmi di pill testing, mentre lo scorso anno il Queensland è diventato il primo Stato australiano a vietare completamente i servizi di controllo delle droghe. Jo Haylen resta convinta che l'approccio adottato dal NSW sia quello giusto. "We know that just saying no alone doesn't stop people taking drugs. But we do know from the evidence that having conversations, that taking a harm minimisation approach, does work - and it will save lives." Per Jennie Ross-King, infine, si tratta di una vittoria dal sapore dolcesamaro. "Nothing will ever bring Alex home. But knowing that something meaningful has come from such devastating loss, and that her story might now save a young person's life, means more than I can put into words."	"To be honest, this is literally the bare minimum. Overdoses have been increasing. Drug presentations to emergency departments have been increasing." Community pill testing is already in place in the ACT and Victoria, with mobile testing also available at certain events - but it's a different story in other states. South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania say they have no interest in pill testing programs, while last year, Queensland became the first state to ban drug checking services altogether. Jo Haylen remains convinced the New South Wales approach strikes the right balance. "We know that just saying no alone doesn't stop people taking drugs. But we do know from the evidence that having conversations, that taking a harm minimisation approach, does work - and it will save lives." And for Jennie, it's a bittersweet victory. "Nothing will ever bring Alex home. But knowing that something meaningful has come from such devastating loss, and that her story might now save a young person's life, means more than I can put into words."
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Report by Deborah Groarke for SBS News.

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