

## Roadside Random Drug Testing In Victoria 'Making Towards Zero Happen'

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### Abstract

In December 2004, Victoria Police became the world's first jurisdiction to implement roadside illicit drug testing (RDT). Initial implementation was a restricted centrally managed program, with limited numbers of tests conducted each year. The RDT program is strongly supported by a range of agencies and road safety partners that provide services to ensure the program is robust, credible and achieves contemporary road safety objectives. The legitimacy of RDT in Victoria provides community confidence that has enabled the program to expand significantly to become a state-wide enforcement program. The RDT program provides a valuable contribution to making towards zero happen.

### Background

In December 2004, Victoria was the first jurisdiction in the world to introduce a random roadside drug testing (RDT) program using oral fluid (saliva) as the testing matrix. The program is risk based rather than impairment based and is only applicable to the three illicit drugs, methamphetamine (MA), 3,4 - methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) and cannabis, delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). The RDT program does not require a driver to display observable signs of impairment as a prerequisite to conduct a drug screening test. The program is risk based, that is, a driver that has one or more of the three target illicit drugs present, at any level, is at a higher risk of being involved in a collision than a drug free driver<sup>1</sup>. The legislative provision to conduct these tests equips police with powers to enable random roadside testing, and to remove offending drivers from the roads.

The powers to conduct roadside drug testing in Victoria demands that high levels of transparency and credibility of the enforcement program are maintained. Maintaining the credibility of the program is fundamental to providing community confidence, and allowing the program to continue to increase its levels of testing to meet the dimensions of the road safety harms sought to be prevented. The RDT program is strongly supported by a range of agencies and road safety partners that provide services to ensure the program is robust, credible and achieves contemporary road safety objectives. The agencies that support the RDT in Victoria include the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, VicRoads, and the Department of Justice and Regulation. The range of services provided by these agencies include independent analysis and confirmation of police roadside detections, statutory and regulatory reviews and reforms, the analysis of roadside detection rates, and the analysis of the prevalence of illicit drugs detected in driver injury and fatal road trauma collisions.

The community confidence in RDT has supported increases in the levels of roadside tests conducted annually. After the commencement of the program in 2004 a total of 13,000 tests were conducted in the first full 12 months of testing. These tests were conducted in very limited, Drug Bus centrally

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<sup>1</sup> Drummer, OH, Gerostamoulos, J, Batziris, H, Chu, m, Caplehorn, J, Robertson, MD & Swann, P 2004 'The involvement of drugs in drivers of motor vehicles killed in Australian road traffic crashes', *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, vol. 36, no.2, p.239.

managed and highly controlled operations, to closely monitor and establish the validity of the testing program. In 2009 the number of tests carried out increased to 22,000, and included the introduction of car-based highway patrol members in some regional areas of the state. In 2010 testing increased to 42,000 tests per annum, once again increasing the number of police trained to conduct the testing. In 2014 a full state-wide enforcement program was implemented enabling 100,000 test per-annum to be conducted and sustained. Sustained effective collaboration with the road safety partners has continued to demonstrate a need to do more to prevent incidences of illicit drug detections in road trauma. This presentation will demonstrate how the learning's already established, and learning's that continue to emerge from the multi-agency approach to RDT continue to provide an evidence based approach to support the success of RDT enforcement in Victoria.

