



Managing Drug Use at Your Event

An Event
Producer's Guide
to Health and Safety
Best Practices

**We know
it's a tricky
subject, but
it's time to
get real.**

The use of alcohol and other drugs is the norm at almost all events, and can have a very big impact on the health and safety of your patrons and even the success of the event itself.

While alcohol is legal and can be managed and discussed in a straightforward manner, addressing other drug use can be challenging for an event producer who does not want to be seen as encouraging or condoning drug use.

The fact is, **a pragmatic approach to managing drug use at events can save lives.** Not only this, but integrating thoughtful, comprehensive services for alcohol and other drug use will be appreciated by your patrons and, with the right communication, your host community.

Improving Standard Services



Enforcement

Drug law enforcement at events is complicated. Police must enforce the law, but arrests do not prevent the majority of use or even sales. Meanwhile a drug arrest can have devastating consequences, negatively impacting an individual's ability to keep or gain employment, housing or financial aid. Strong emphasis on enforcement can often lead to patrons consuming all their drugs before entry, a dangerous practice.

Events that make use of amnesty bins, where attendees have the option to surrender their drugs before entry, are a step in the right direction. Applying this philosophy at point of entry searches – where if a substance is found, the person has the option to surrender it rather than facing ejection or arrest – keeps event producers in compliance with the law, places the emphasis on patron health, and allows enforcement to focus instead on stopping violent or dangerous behavior.



Medical

Good event preparation includes having advanced medical services onsite. Medical personnel should have festival medical experience and receive training on the variety of drugs used in party settings and their effects, including new psychoactive substances.

Medical personnel should be aware of other support services and able to refer patrons to the right place within the event. An important contribution a well-trained medical team can offer is their ability to integrate seamlessly with drug education and onsite mental health services.

Adding Needed Health Services



Onsite Mental Health

Medical teams are often asked to handle patrons requiring mental health support services. For example, someone who has had too much alcohol may become lost or separated from friends. Someone who has taken a psychedelic drug or MDMA may be disoriented or may be experiencing an emotional crisis.

For patrons who are having a difficult experience, but are medically stable, an optimal practice is to incorporate trained mental health counselors, therapists or peers to sit with these individuals and provide compassionate care. Ideally, this should take place in a dedicated safe space separate from but located near the medical area. This enables medical teams to provide critical care for those who are actually in need. It also reduces unnecessary hospital transfers, arrests, and potentially additional trauma to patrons having difficulties.



Education

A responsible event producer reminds his or her patrons the possible risks of alcohol and other drug use. Young people in particular are often poorly informed about basic alcohol and drug effects and safety. Partnering with a nonprofit or local public health agency can help provide accurate information. Implementing peer-to-peer outreach services is also an effective evidence-based practice.

Another practice that has been effective at reducing deaths and hospitalizations is drug checking for adulterants (also known as “pill testing”). This process allows people who use drugs to identify and avoid ingesting unknown substances to protect themselves. Drug checking results can be shared with patrons, medical and mental health workers, hospitals, and law enforcement to educate them about local trends and potentially harmful drug combinations.

Establishing Safe Settings

Event producers already follow detailed procedures and event safety standards set by fire departments, licensing and permitting agencies, and industry groups like the Event Safety Alliance. However, alcohol and other drug use adds additional risks these procedures and standards do not always take into account.

Given that alcohol and many other drugs cause dehydration, services like free water access should not simply be “preferred” but required safety standards. Similarly, the event layout itself should be assessed to designate a space away from stages where patrons can comfortably sit to allow for rest and recovery. Since both legal and illegal substances can increase heart rate and raise body temperature, event producers should consider voluntarily selling under set capacity limits and going beyond basic requirements for fans and cooling. Taking actions like these will greatly reduce the incidence of medical emergencies, hospitalizations and deaths.

Help Navigating Relationships

The most important thing you can do as you begin to integrate these services is to make sure you have supportive allies in your host community: city officials and law enforcement in particular.

The organizations listed here have experience advocating for and implementing drug use management best practices and would be happy to help facilitate new relationships or help build on existing relationships.



DanceSafe is a 501(c)(3) public health organization promoting health and safety within the nightlife and electronic music communities. Since 1998, DanceSafe has been successful at providing peer-to-peer outreach services to distribute free water, earplugs, sunscreen, and drug and sexual health resources in addition to drug checking services where feasible.

Missi Wooldridge, MPH, Executive Director
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The Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) is the nation's leading organization promoting drug policies that are grounded in science, compassion, health and human rights. Within the nightlife and festival community DPA advocates for expansion of drug education and harm reduction as well as policy changes that will protect both partygoers and event producers.

Stefanie Jones, Nightlife Community Engagement Manager
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Mutual Aid Response Services (MARS) provides the festival and event industry with comprehensive consulting, risk management, and emergency medical services, including permitting, policy, government and media relations with a focus on progressive approaches to public health and emergency management.

Joseph Pred, Founder and CEO | joseph.pred@mars911.info



The Zendo Project is an onsite harm reduction service providing compassionate care and education for individuals having difficult psychedelic experiences.

Linnae Ponte, Zendo Project Coordinator | zendo@maps.org

A Chance to Save Lives and Remove Barriers to Effective Drug Use Management

While it is possible for some event producers to implement the services in this guide now, they would be better able to do so with key changes in national and state-level drug policy. An increasing number of people outside of the event industry recognize this, including some who have been most tragically impacted by the event industry's limitations on addressing drug use health and safety.

Dede Goldsmith, a mother whose daughter died after taking MDMA and attending an event, is leading a campaign to Amend the RAVE Act, federal legislation that has inadvertently prevented many event producers from taking steps to address drug use with maximum health and safety concerns in mind. If successful, this amendment would clear an even broader path for the services described in this guide.

Please visit www.amendtheraveact.org to learn more about this campaign and how to lend your support.



Dede Goldsmith and her daughter, Shelley.