

# Requirements for drug checking services in Queensland

September 2023

## Purpose

This document defines and specifies requirements and expectations for the delivery of drug checking services in Queensland. It is for service providers seeking to establish drug checking services in Queensland (funded through the Queensland Government or other sources).

## Brief Definition

Drug checking is a voluntary, free and confidential harm reduction service that engages people intending to use substances in a brief health intervention combined with results of chemical analysis of the substances intended for use.

In Queensland fixed site and event-based drug checking services are defined as follows.

**Fixed site** services operate from more permanent, stationary sites such as those within an existing health service. It is preferable that fixed site services operate as a standalone service co-located (operated on the same premises) with other health services for client privacy purposes.

**Event based** (sometimes called mobile) services are those that operate in temporary sites such as those associated with music festivals or cultural, sporting or other events and including nightlife and entertainment settings.

## Requirements for drug checking services

### Approval and compliance with Queensland regulation

The *Medicines and Poisons Act 2019* (MPA) and the *Medicines and Poisons (Poisons and Prohibited Substances) Regulation 2021* (MPR) provide the legislative framework for the regulation of substances in Queensland via the approval and compliance processes.

Applications for a General Approval – Regulated Poisons Laboratory (General Approval) under Section 68 of the MPA to buy, possess, apply and dispose of regulated substances (Schedule 4, Schedule 8, Schedule 9 and Schedule 10 substances which are described in the Poisons Standard) for the purpose of analysis are considered by the Chief Executive of the Department of Health under the MPA. This pathway supports a health regulatory framework for drug checking services in Queensland.

1. Operators of a drug checking services must apply for general approval authority under the *MPA* through the Health Protection Branch in the Department of Health. The General Approval provides an approval holder with authority to buy, possess, apply and dispose for Schedule 4, 8, 9, and 10 substances for certain purposes, such as the operation of a commercial laboratory.
2. The approval holder must ensure that storage of regulated poisons occur in accordance with the measures specified in the Queensland Health Guideline –

### [Guidelines for storage of poisons and prohibited substances](#)

3. The approval holder must ensure that disposal of regulated poisons occur in accordance with the measures specified in the [Regulated Poisons Disposals Requirements](#)
4. An approval holder must prepare and implement a substance management plan in compliance with the Departmental Standard – Substance management plans in Chapter 4, Part 2 of the *MPA* and Chapter 4 of the *MPR*. See the [Queensland Health Departmental Standard: Substance management plans for regulated poisons](#).
5. Activities authorised by the approval are to be undertaken only at the authorised locations included in the conditions of the approval.
6. Queensland Health (QH) has a risk-based compliance monitoring process to ensure that General Approval holders comply with their conditions of authority.
7. For further information and application details visit [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/1112792/form-general-approval-substances.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/1112792/form-general-approval-substances.pdf)

## Engagement with Queensland Health, Queensland Police Service and Queensland Ambulance Service

Drug checking service providers intending to establish services in Queensland should first engage with QH to discuss requirements and expectations.

On receipt of regulatory approval, the General Approval holder must further engage with QH and also with the Queensland Police Service (QPS). This engagement must occur before commencing service delivery with a minimum of **60 business days' notice** prior to operating for planning purposes. QH will be the contact point between the approval holder and the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) regarding service delivery plans and discuss any QAS requirements.

All General Approval holders must continue to communicate any changes to their services with the QPS and QH (for example any change to operating hours of service or other service details).

*Refer to the contact details at end of this document.*

### **Specific engagement is also required as follows:**

#### **Event-based**

1. General Approval holders need to liaise with QPS Major Events Unit (via the Drug and Alcohol Coordination Unit as the first point of contact for QPS), and provide information including dates of the event, location of the service within or outside the event perimeter, times of operation, capacity of service (number of people who can be processed in a timeframe) and security plan for the facility where substances are to be held for analysis.
2. Approval holders are required to engage with the event operator and the venue owner in the initial planning stages preferably **three months prior to the event**.
3. Approval holders must operate a standalone service but must work in cooperation with onsite first aid/health service providers and peer support services prior to the commencement of the event and preferably co-locate services in close proximity.

## Fixed site

4. General Approval holders need to liaise with the QPS Officer in Charge of the relevant police division (via the Drug and Alcohol Coordination Unit as the first point of contact for QPS) and provide information regarding the service such as hours of operation.

## Delivery of high-quality health interventions

5. As an alcohol and other drug harm reduction service type, drug checking services in Queensland are expected to be delivered in line with the:
  - [National Quality Framework for Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services](#);
  - [National Framework for Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Treatment 2019-29](#);
  - [Queensland Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment and Harm Reduction Outcomes Framework](#)
6. Drug checking services in Queensland will include appropriately trained and supported health and harm reduction workers for delivery of health interventions. This can include alcohol and other drug peer workers that are appropriately trained and supervised in delivering brief interventions and harm reduction.
7. It is also expected that drug checking service workers conducting the chemical analysis processes are appropriately skilled and qualified analytical chemists with a Lead Chemist responsible for overseeing analysis and reporting.
8. The drug testing equipment used for analysis is expected to be of a contemporary best practice standard such as a Fourier-transformed infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) with additional laboratory testing equipment utilised to reliably identify substances within a timely period including supplementary testing such as fentanyl testing strips and reagent colorimetric testing.
9. Services are expected to be delivered as free and confidential for patrons.
10. For event-based services, providers need to ensure that the onsite environment is fit for purpose including adequate testing conditions such as temperature controls and other considerations such as service accessibility and patron privacy.
11. It is requirement that patrons are advised that the sample they provide for chemical analysis will be destroyed in the testing process and will not be returned.
12. Patrons should also be provided with the opportunity to discard additional substances for further analysis and/or secure onsite destruction through a medical waste disposal such as amnesty bins.
13. Patrons accessing a drug checking service must be provided with information required to provide informed consent and sign a liability waiver.
14. Drug checking service providers are required to hold appropriate public liability insurance.
15. Patrons under the age of 18 should not be excluded from accessing the service however they must be able to provide informed consent and sign a waiver.

## Participation in Queensland monitoring and evaluation activity

16. Drug checking service providers in Queensland are required to participate in state-wide monitoring which includes providing relevant information and data to QH.
17. These requirements will be discussed with providers through engagement with QH.
18. Drug checking services funded by QH are required to participate in evaluation of services conducted by an independent research agency procured by QH.

## Participation in Queensland early warning/drug alert systems

19. Drug checking service providers in Queensland are required to participate in relevant Queensland public health early warning systems.
20. This includes providing advice of findings from drug checking service chemical analysis and notifying QH and QPS in a timely manner if any high risk or potentially dangerous substances are identified.
21. Drug checking services are also expected to be part of communication channels for issuing information to reach identified target groups with alerts.
22. These requirements will be discussed with providers through engagement with QH and QPS.

## Key contacts for engagement

QH – [mhaod-spb-corro@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:mhaod-spb-corro@health.qld.gov.au)

QPS – Drug and Alcohol Coordination Unit [DACU@police.qld.gov.au](mailto:DACU@police.qld.gov.au) (including to facilitate contact with the Major Events Unit and the QPS Officer in Charge of the relevant police divisions).