

Assessment tool for peer-based harm reduction services

When to seek medical assistance



Peer-based harm reduction services make an important contribution to keeping people safe at music festivals and other events. They deliver a range of educational and supportive services, including roving the event to engage with patrons in drug harm reduction and delivering brief interventions; and providing supervised care spaces where patrons experiencing distress or mild symptoms of intoxication can take time out.

Rovers can monitor and report on trends and behaviours in the crowd, can identify patrons in distress, and, for patrons already in the care of a peer-based service, can identify clients who may deteriorate rapidly or need medical care.

Peer-based services must have clear criteria to determine whether transfer or referral to an onsite medical provider or emergency service is required.

Wherever possible, supervised care spaces should be located in close proximity to an onsite medical service to facilitate the early and rapid transfer of patrons between services. Peer-based services and the onsite medical provider should work collaboratively to promote a proactive and all-inclusive crowd care strategy, with established processes and procedures to identify and refer unwell patrons. Routine attendance of the peer-based service team leader at event planning, pre-brief meetings, on-site briefings and de-brief meetings can build relationships and support communication and referral between the services.

The purpose of this assessment tool is to assist peer-based harm reduction staff to determine whether patrons should be referred for urgent medical assessment or assistance. It is important to reinforce that peer-based harm reduction staff and volunteers can and should **refer anyone that they feel needs medical attention** even if they do not present with recognisable signs or symptoms.

If you are unsure at any time, please refer the patron to the onsite medical provider for assessment, even if the patron is not agreeable to medical care.

If there is no onsite medical provider, immediately notify the onsite Ambulance Forward Commander or call for emergency assistance on Triple Zero (000).

For further information see the [Guidelines for Music Festival Organisers: Music Festival Harm Reduction](#)

Signs requiring medical assistance or referral to emergency medical service

The person is not conscious of their behaviour:

- Unconscious, difficult to wake or cannot stay awake and alert
- Agitated or being violent (also call security or police)
- Displaying arching of the back, seizure or fitting
- Hearing or seeing things (hallucinations, delusions and/or confusion)
- Has severe paranoia, a sense of fear or dread or severe anxiety when left alone

The person's breathing has changed:

- They are not breathing
- Breathing is very fast – chest raising more than 20 times a minute
- Breathing is very slow – not able to see chest move or < 8-10 breaths per minute

They have signs of heart problems:

- Chest pain or tightness in the chest
- Heart beating fast
- Pale, cool, clammy skin
- Feels dizzy / fainting
- Unable to stand

They are showing signs of drug overdose:

- Hot and can't cool down
- Clammy skin
- Dry, red (or pale), hot skin (stopped sweating)
- Dry mouth
- Blue/purple lips
- Eyes rolling back/obvious eye 'wobbles'
- Foot/leg is uncontrollably shaking
- Rigid muscles
- Unable to walk unassisted
- Locked jaw or repeated jaw clenching (even if otherwise well)

They have:

- Requested medical attention
- A head injury
- Severe headache
- Repeated vomiting
- Severe stomach pains
- Effects of pre-existing medical condition e.g. asthma attack, reported low blood sugar
- A rash or swelling that may be an allergic reaction
- An injury or bleeding that warrants medical attention
- Reported a snake bite or spider bite