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Prompt Response Network, Drug Alert Report 2025

Drug alerts republished on TheKnow.org.au

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Summary

In 2025, 64 drug alerts were published in Australia, (47 in 2024). These included 13 for benzodiazepines (4 in 2024), 18 nitazenes (14 in 2024), and 11 for high-dose MDMA (15 in 2024). There were 6 alerts that indicated direct harm resulting from a substance.

In 2025:

- **Number of drug alerts**: A total of 64 unique drug alerts were republished on The Know, in 2025 (47 in 2024). Twenty-three were issued by government agencies and 41 by non-government drug checking services (DCS).
- **Service changes:** The Victorian Pill Testing Service (VPTS) fixed-site drug checking service opened in August 2025. Queensland's fixed site drug checking services closed in April 2025.
- **Substance detections:** Alerts related to detections of a range of substances, most notably for benzodiazepines (13 alerts in 2025, 4 in 2024) and nitazenes (18 alerts in 2025, 14 in 2024).
- **Reasons for concern:** Fifty-one alerts were issued for unexpected detections, and 38 of these alerts related to the detections of at least one new/novel psychoactive substance[1] (NPS). Eleven alerts were issued due to the detection of 'high-dose' MDMA pressed pills/tablets or capsules. Six alerts related to detections of opioids that were linked to hospital presentations or death, four of these alerts were recorded as being in samples not expected to contain opioids.
- **Issuing organisations:** Alerts were issued by seven different government and drug-checking organisations in four jurisdictions: ACT, NSW, QLD, and VIC.
- **Limitations to interpretation and comparison:** Currently there are no standardised national reporting guidelines for drug alerts in Australia. Comparisons between 2024 and 2025 must be interpreted with caution. This data does not indicate changes or trends in substance detections but rather indicates differences in the publication of drug alerts over time.

Background

Drug alerts are publicly issued communications on signals (most commonly substance detections) of public health concern issued by government and community agencies across Australia. Terminology differs between agencies and jurisdictions, and they may be referred to as public drug warnings, drug alerts, or community notices.

The Prompt Response Network (PRN) brings together agencies with the aim of enhancing public health decision-making and responses to emerging drugs and drug trends. The network is facilitated by the National Centre for Clinical Research on Emerging Drugs (NCCRED) which monitors drug alerts issued in Australia and shares these via the following PRN communication channels:

- The Know public website (theknow.org.au)
- An online professional community platform (The Know Community)
- Email distribution lists

The PRN is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

This report provides an overview of drug alerts issued in Australian jurisdictions that were republished on TheKnow.org.au in 2025. It is not an exhaustive summary of all substance detections of concern than occurred in Australia in 2025. Targeted (e.g. clinician safety notices) and other drug related communications including routine drug checking reports are not included in this report. One alert can include multiple detections - we report on both the alert and the substances detected. In some cases, multiple alerts may be issued for the same detection or concern. For statistical summaries of detected substances, only the first unique alert is included. All alerts, including those that did not contain information regarding new substance detections (such as reposts by other organisations), are listed in **Appendix 1**. Only information included in the original alert is reported here.

The first NCCRED annual drug alert report (2024) was published in 2025 for the reporting period of the 2024 calendar year. Where possible, this report outlines data included in the 2024.

In 2025, alerts were issued by seven different government and drug-checking organisations in four jurisdictions: ACT, NSW, QLD, and VIC.

Abbreviations

ACT = Australian Capital Territory

CanTEST = CanTEST Health & Drug Checking Service

DCS = Drug checking service

MDMA = 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine

NSW = New South Wales

NCCRED = National Centre for Clinical Research on Emerging Drugs

NPS = New/novel psychoactive substances

PRN = Prompt Response Network

QLD = Queensland

VIC = Victoria

VicDoH = Victorian Department of Health

VPTS = The Victorian Pill Testing Service

High risk/urgent alerts

Currently, three organisations categorise their risk communications by level of risk/urgency. CanTEST and Pill Testing Australia (PTA) use 'Red'/'Yellow' hierarchy and the Victorian Pill Testing Service (VPTS) use 'Urgent'/'General'. In 2025, ten alerts were categorised by the issuing organisation as 'Red' or 'Urgent', denoting a high risk of harm associated with the sample tested. These alerts are summarised below.

- Methamphetamine was found in a sample expected to be GHB (CanTEST, 14-Mar)
- Protonitazene was detected twice in an 'oxycodone' pill (CanTEST, 18-Apr; CanTEST, 31-May)
- Protonitazene, bromazolam, alprazolam and diazepam were found in 'Xanax' pill (CanTEST, 03-May).
- Heroin was detected in a cocaine sample in Canberra in July (CanTEST, 16-Jul)
- Isotocyanozene (5-cyano isotodesnitazene) was detected for the first time by an Australian DCS in September 2025 (CanTEST, 22-Sep). Detections of isotocyanozene have subsequently led to two more public drug alerts: 'Red' community notice (CanTEST, 03-Oct/a); public health alert QLD Health, 03-Oct).
- Metonitazene and protonitazene were detected in a suspected 'opioid' capsule (CanTEST, 23-Sep)
- A combination of methylmethqualone and flurofentanyl was detected in a sample expected to contain an "unknown opioid" (CanTEST, 03-Oct/b).
- Medetomidine was detected in a sample expected to contain bromazolam (VPTS, 27-Nov)

It should be noted that in 2025, PTA did not issue any public alerts and VPTS only began to issue alerts in September, adopting the Urgent/General hierarchy for the first time on October 20.

Reasons for Concern

Unexpected Substance Detections

An 'unexpected detection' occurs when either the substances detected in a sample differ from what the sample was expected to contain, or when an unusual/uncommon (in an Australian context) substance is detected in a sample where no expected substance is recorded. A full summary of unexpected substances detected can be found in **Appendix 2**.

In 2025, 51 unique alerts reported unexpected substance detections (33 in 2024). Of the alerts for unexpected substances, 31% (n=16) were for nitazenes in 2025 (33%, n=11 in 2024). Unexpected benzodiazepine detections increased in 2025, accounting for 25% (n=13) of the unexpected substance detections (15%, n=5 in 2024). Unexpected cathinone detections were reported in 8% (n=4) of alerts reporting unexpected detections (21%, n=7 in 2024). Ketamine analogues accounted for 8% (n=4) of unexpected alerts, (3%, n=1 in 2024).

Expected substances

In 2025, among alerts involving unexpected detections, the most frequently reported *expected* substances belonged to the following sub-classes:

- Benzodiazepines (reported in 19 alerts), including alprazolam (14 alerts) and diazepam (2 alerts)
- Opiates (reported in 9 alerts), including oxycodone (8 alerts) and heroin (1 alert)
- Meth/amphetamines (reported in 6 alerts), including MDMA (4 alerts) and methamphetamine (2 alerts)

Counterfeit pharmaceuticals

Fourteen alerts reported unexpected detections in 'counterfeit pharmaceutical products' (products manufactured to look like approved/trademarked medicines). All of these alerts reported unexpected detections in counterfeit alprazolam (9 alerts) or oxycodone (5 alerts) products:

- Alprazolam: 9 'Xanax' bars (whole or partially crushed) and 1 'Mylan' tablet were reported
- Oxycodone: 4 blue 'M30' pills (whole or partially crushed) and one green 'OC80' tablet

It should be noted that both Xanax and Mylan are no longer legitimate trade names for alprazolam in Australia and legitimate oxycodone is now marked 'ON'.

Detections of NPS

In 2025, 38 alerts (75% of alerts reporting unexpected detection) reported the unexpected detection of NPS, (26 in 2024 (79%). Of note is that in 2025 11 alerts related to unexpected detections of *novel* benzodiazepines, (5 in 2024). Other frequent NPS detections reported in alerts came from the subclass nitazenes (16 alerts), ketamine analogues (3 alerts) and cathinones (4 alerts).

Novel benzodiazepines

The number of alerts related to unexpected detections of novel benzodiazepines (NBZs) more than doubled in 2025, compared to 2024, reflecting a longer trend: Between January 2020 and June 2025, 23 drug alerts were issued in relation to NBZs; of those, 11 were issued between January-June 2025.[1] They are also the most frequently detected type of NPS in Australian emergency department admissions. Recent research has also highlighted the spike in fatal NBZ-related toxicity cases, with 87% of all cases since 2013 occurring between 2020-2025.[2] There is a need for ongoing research and monitoring to reduce the harms from NBZs.

High-dose MDMA

A threshold of 150mg MDMA free base[3] is often used to support decision-making about issuing high-dose MDMA alerts.

In 2025, 11 alerts (17% of **all unique alerts**) reported detection of high-dose MDMA samples (vs 15 alerts (32% of all unique alerts) in 2024).

Unlike in 2024, where only pill/tablet samples were reported, two alerts in 2025 reported the detection of >150mg MDMA free base in capsule samples ('caps') (NSW Health, 07-Oct; NSW Health, 27-Nov).

31 pills/capsules were described across these alerts, with some sample descriptions relating to multiple samples analysed. High dose detections ranged from 138mg to 294mg of free base MDMA present in a given sample. High-dose MDMA detections described in alerts in 2025 are summarised in **Appendix 3**.

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[1] Freestone J, Kypri S, Schumann JL, Franklin E, Francis C, Barratt MJ, Peacock A, Sutherland R, Clifford B, MacDonald H, Ezard N. The Emergence of Novel Benzodiazepines in Australia, Evidence, Alerts, Clinical Management and Harm Reduction—A Narrative Review. Drug and Alcohol Review. 2026 Jan;45(1):e70086.
[2] Darke S, Duflou J, Farrell M, Lappin J, Peacock A. Changing characteristics in the 2020s of fatal 'novel'benzodiazepine toxicity cases in Australia. Drug and Alcohol Dependence. 2026 May 1;282:113085.
[3] *150mg MDMA free base is approximately equivalent to 179mg MDMA hydrochloride. Current drug checking methods do not allow for the determination of the MDMA salt present in a sample, however MDMA hydrochloride is the most common form.*

Limitations to Interpretation

Currently there are no standardised national reporting guidelines for drug alerts in Australia. Organisations differ in their decision-making and reporting processes, but also in their capacity and willingness to disclose certain information in drug alerts. As such, drug alerts in Australia vary in the type of information they include and the level of specificity with which information is reported. These inconsistencies may limit the interpretation and comparability over time of the summaries reported, as does jurisdictional changes in drug checking service availability.

Alert counts do not accurately indicate how often a substance is detected. Drug alerts are issued on the basis of perceived risk by jurisdictional decision-makers (which involve a range of contextual factors), and analytical certainty regarding detected substances. They are a public health function aimed at reducing drug-related harm, not at providing accurate metrics about substance detections over time. This report utilises the information contained in these alerts.

Comparisons between 2024 and 2025 data must be interpreted with caution. Because of the jurisdictional differences noted above, as well as service changes, these comparisons are not metrics of changes to substance detections. Instead, this report summarises the number and content of drug alerts issued in 2025, comparing this to 2024 to indicate how the publication of drug alerts in Australia may have changed over time.

Appendix 1 - Drug alerts listed on TheKnow.org.au in 2025

Date	Jurisdiction	Organisation	Title
05-Feb-25	ACT	CanTEST	Bromazolam and clobromazolam found in counterfeit 'Xanax' sample
07-Feb-25	NSW	NSW Health	A white tablet containing a nitazene (protonitazene) has caused severe opioid overdose in Sydney
19-Feb-25	ACT	CanTEST	Multiple high dose MDMA pills
28-Feb-25	ACT	CanTEST	Clonazolam found in counterfeit 'Xanax' pill
28-Feb-25	ACT	CanTEST	Bromonordiazepam found in counterfeit 'Xanax' pill
10-Mar-25	VIC	VIC DOH	High-dose ecstasy tablets in hot conditions
12-Mar-25	VIC	VIC DOH	4-CMC in white or off-white crystal form being sold as MDMA
13-Mar-25	ACT	CanTEST	Methamphetamine found in ketamine sample
14-Mar-25	ACT	CanTEST	High dose MDMA pill
14-Mar-25	ACT	CanTEST	Liquid free base methamphetamine found in 'GHB' sample
28-Mar-25	VIC	VIC DOH	Heroin sold as cocaine and methamphetamine in Melbourne
28-Mar-25	NSW	NSW Health	Nitazenes found in counterfeit oxycodone tablets in NSW
03-Apr-25	QLD	QLD Health	Tablets sold as oxycodone containing a strong nitazene
14-Apr-25	QLD	QLD Health	Pressed pill sold as oxycodone containing a strong nitazene
16-Apr-25	QLD	QLD Health	Novel benzodiazepine found in counterfeit 'Xanax' pressed pill and off-white powder
17-Apr-25	NT	NT Health	Nitazenes detected in tablets in the Northern Territory
18-Apr-25	ACT	CanTEST	Protonitazene found in 'oxycodone' pill
28-Apr-25	ACT	CanTEST	Ethylbromazolam and bromonordiazepam found in 'alprazolam' pill
28-Apr-25	ACT	CanTEST	Clonazepam and diazepam found in 'alprazolam' pill
28-Apr-25	ACT	CanTEST	Bromazolam and clobromazolam found in 'Xanax' pill
05-May-25	VIC	VIC DOH	White-brown powder containing metonitazene
06-May-25	NSW	NSW Health	Multiple high dose MDMA (ecstasy) tablets circulating in NSW
16-May-25	ACT	CanTEST	Diazepam, clonazepam, tapentadol, donepezil and denatonium found in diazepam pill
17-May-25	ACT	CanTEST	Pregabalin and bromonordiazepam found in 'alprazolam' pill
30-May-25	VIC	VIC DOH	Potent dissociative 'O-PCE' sold as methamphetamine or MDMA
31-May-25	ACT	CanTEST	Protonitazene found in crushed partial 'oxycodone' pill
03-Jun-25	ACT	CanTEST	Ethylbromazolam found in expected alprazolam pills
03-Jun-25	ACT	CanTEST	Protonitazene, bromazolam, alprazolam and diazepam found in crushed partial 'Xanax' pill
05-Jun-25	ACT	ACT Health	Dangerous drugs found in counterfeit 'Xanax' in Canberra
02-Jul-25	ACT	CanTEST	AB-MDMSBA, 4F-MBZP and N-cyclohexyl pentylone found in crushed alprazolam pill

16-Jul-25	ACT	CanTEST	Heroin found in cocaine sample
17-Jul-25	QLD	QLD Health	Confirmed detection of Carfentanil in Queensland
23-Jul-25	ACT	CanTEST	Flubromazepam and bromazolam found in two different expected ‘Xanax’ and ‘diazepam’ samples
23-Jul-25	ACT	CanTEST	Zolpidem found in lorazepam pill
23-Jul-25	ACT	CanTEST	Tramadol found in expected alprazolam pill
27-Aug-25	ACT	CanTEST	2-oxo-PCE found in ‘ketamine’ sample
03-Sep-25 [Updated 12-Sep-25]	VIC	VPTS	Protonitazene found in fake oxycodone tablet
09-Sep-25	NSW	NSW Health	Multiple opioid overdoses following use of cocaine
18-Sep-25	VIC	VPTS	New detection of a nitazene in blue fake oxycodone pill
18-Sep-25	VIC	VICDoH	Blue ‘M30’ tablets containing extremely potent ‘nitazene’ opioids
22-Sep-25	ACT	CanTEST	Isotocyanozene found in ‘opioid’ capsule
23-Sep-25	ACT	CanTEST	Metonitazene and protonitazene found in ‘opioid’ capsule
30-Sep-25	ACT	CanTEST	4’-Cl-deschloroalprazolam found in expected benzo samples
03-Oct-25	QLD	QLD Health	Confirmed detection of N-pyrrolidino protonitazene and protonitazene in Queensland
03-Oct-25/a	ACT	CanTEST	Isotocyanozene found in 'benzo' sample
03-Oct-25/b	ACT	CanTEST	Methylmethaqualone and flurofentanyl found in ‘opioid’ capsule
07-Oct-25 [Updated 08-Oct-25]	NSW	NSW Health	Multiple high dose MDMA (ecstasy) tablets and capsules circulating in NSW
15-Oct-25	QLD	QLD Health	First report of 5-cyano isotodesnitazene in Queensland
17-Oct-25	ACT	CanTEST	5-Hydroxytryptophan found in unknown powder
18-Oct-25	ACT	CanTEST	Rilmalzafone found in ‘opioid’ capsule
20-Oct-25	VIC	VPTS	Tiletamine and N-Benzylcyclohexanamine missold as ‘M-CAT’ or 4-MMC
14-Nov-25	ACT	CanTEST	High Dose MDMA Pill
27-Nov-25	NSW	NSW Health	Multiple high dose MDMA (ecstasy) tablets and capsules circulating in NSW
27-Nov-25	NSW	NSW Health	Ketamine analogues detected recently in NSW
27-Nov-25	VIC	VPTS	Medetomidine found in crystal/powder expected to contain bromazolam
04-Dec-25	VIC	VPTS	MDA found in MDMA pills
05-Dec-25	VIC	VicDoH	High-dose MDMA capsules and pills are circulating in Victoria
09-Dec-25	ACT	CanTEST	High dose MDMA pill
12-Dec-25	NSW	NSW Health	Multiple high dose MDMA (ecstasy) tablets circulating in NSW
12-Dec-25	ACT	CanTEST	High dose MDMA pills
12-Dec-25	VIC	VPTS	Heroin sold as alprazolam

13-Dec-25	ACT	CanTEST	*N*,*N*-dimethylpentylone found in MDMA
15-Dec-25	NSW	NSW Health	Multiple high dose MDMA (ecstasy) tablets circulating in NSW
23-Dec-25	VIC	VPTS	Tramadol sold as oxycodone
24-Dec-25	VIC	VPTS	*N*-ethylpentylone sold as liquid methylphenidate (ritalin)
31-Dec-25	NSW	NSW Health	Multiple high dose MDMA (ecstasy) tablets circulating in NSW

Appendix 2 – Summary of unexpected substances reported, 2025

Drug Class* (no. of alerts)	Drug Subclass (no. of alerts)	Substances** (no. of alerts)
Stimulants (7)	Meth/amphetamines (3)	Methamphetamine (2), MDA (2)
	Cathinones (4)	*4-CMC (1), N-cyclohexylpentylone (1), DMP (1), N-ethylpentylone (1)*
	Arylpiperazines & benzylpiperazines (1)	*4F-MBZP (1)*
Opioids (25)	Nitazenes (16)	*Protonitazene (8), isotocyanozne (3), N-desethyl isotonitazene (2), metonitazene (2), N-pyrrolidino protonitazene (1), unspecified (1), "protonitazene or isotonitazene" (1)*
	Opioids (3)	Heroin (3)
	Fentanyl/analogues (2)	*Carfentinil (1), fluorofentanyl (1)*
	Other opioids (3)	Tramadol (2), tapentadol (1)
	Unspecified (1)	Unspecified (1)
Sedative/hypnotics (17)	Benzodiazepines (13)	*Bromazolam (4),* *bromonordiazepam (3), clobromazolam (3),* *clonazepam (2),* Diazepam (2), *ethylbromazolam (2), flubromazolam (2), clonazolam (1), 4'-chloro-deschloalprazolam (1)*
	Gabapentinoids (1)	Pregabalin (1)
	Quinazolinones (1)	*Methylmethaqualone (1)*
	Other sedative/hypnotics (3)	Medetomidine (1), rilmalzafone (1), medetomidine (1)
Dissociatives (4)	Ketamine/analogues (4)	*2-oxo-PCE (3), 2F-2'-oxo-PCE (1), tiletamine (1)*
Cannabinoids (1)	Synthetic cannabinoids (1)	*AB-MDMSBA (1)*
Other (4)	Cutting agent (3)	N-Benzylcyclohexamine (1), denatonium (1), donezapil (1), paracetamol (1)
	Other (1)	5-HTP (1)

*Appendix 2 contains data from 51 unique alerts. Italicised drug names denote NPS. *Drug classes and subclasses are adapted from the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service and Cannabis Laboratory classification framework - see Drug classification - Public Health Agency of Canada. **Different organisations choose to use different naming conventions when reporting detected substances. For the purpose of collating data in Appendix 2, substance names have been standardised by the authors, but it should be noted that the name used here may differ from that used in the original alert. Abbreviations: 4-CMC=4-chloromethcathinone; 4F-MBZP=4-fluoro-methylbenzylpiperazine; 5-HTP=5-hydroxytrypophan; DMP=N,N-dimethylpentyone; MDA=3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine*

Appendix 3 – Summary of ‘high-dose’ MDMA detections reported in alerts, 2025

Description of sample*	Reported dose of MDMA free base	Issuing organisation, date of alert
Green irregular shaped tablet with ‘Rick and Morty’ marking	251	NSW Health, 31 Dec
Green shield shaped tablet with skull ‘punisher’ marking	169	NSW Health, 31 Dec
Yellow heart shaped tablet with ‘GOYA’ marking	174	NSW Health, 31 Dec
[Multiple] blue ‘Hello Kitty’ tablets**	“up to 186”	NSW Health, 31 Dec
Yellow square tablet with ‘Facebook’ logo marking	256	NSW Health, 31 Dec
Pale orange ‘Hello Kitty’ tablet	151	NSW Health, 15 Dec
Pink skull shaped tablet with ‘MYBRAND’ marking on reverse	229	NSW Health, 15 Dec
Grey ‘grim reaper’ press pill	162	CanTEST, 12 Dec
Grey ‘grim reaper’ press pill	162	CanTEST, 12 Dec
Grey ‘grim reaper’ press pill	225	CanTEST, 12 Dec
Grey ‘grim reaper’ press pill	282	CanTEST, 12 Dec
Grey irregular shaped scored tablet marked with a grenade and "NL" on reverse	146	NSW Health, 12 Dec
Blue, Ace of Spades pill	160	NSW Health, 12 Dec
Green ‘punisher’ press pill with a score mark on the rear	160	CanTEST, 09 Dec
*Multiple hexagonal tablets with Philipp Plein markings, skull on reverse [varying in weight, colour, and dose]	“at least 138”	NSW Health, 27 Nov
Yellow ***capsule*** with 'Boba Fett' markings	142	NSW Health, 27 Nov
Blue ***capsule*** with ghost markings	233	NSW Health, 27 Nov
Green, skull shaped tablet	214	NSW Health, 27 Nov
Yellow, sparkly square tablet with Facebook 'F' marking	229	NSW Health, 27 Nov
Grey, 'Maserati' press pill	294	CanTest, 14 Nov
Blue, shield shaped tablet with 'Punisher' markings	209	NSW Health, 07 Oct
[Multiple] blue, skull shaped tablets**	152	NSW Health, 07 Oct
Red, rectangular, with "Red Bull" logo and text on reverse	220	NSW Health, 06-May
Pink, triangular, scored	199	NSW Health, 06-May
Blue, irregular, with "Audi" logo	184	NSW Health, 06-May
Grey, shield shaped, with "Black Ops" marking	161	NSW Health, 06-May
Blue, irregular with skull markings	145	NSW Health, 06-May
Dark grey, 'Maserati' press pill	170	CanTEST, 19-Feb
Dark grey, 'Maserati' press pill	176	CanTEST, 19-Feb
Yellow 'Spongebob' pill with white and orange flecks	Not reported†	VicDoH, 9-Mar
Pink pill with a ring with a star press on the front and a break line with the words ‘POP SMOKE’ and ‘300MG’ on the back	246	CanTEST, 14-Mar

*Distinct samples reported in the same alert are recorded here separately. *Where possible, descriptions are copied from original alerts. [Any added information is denoted in brackets]; **Multiple samples matching description were detected.*

† Information about this tablet was included in an alert regarding the use of high doses of MDMA in hot weather conditions – no MDMA dose was reported in this alert