Ten years of drug detection dogs in Australia: What impact have they had on nightlife settings?

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Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
Drug detection dogs


The Act provided the police with the power to enter premises and undertake 'general drug detection'. The police may enter without a warrant any licensed premises, a sporting event, concert or artistic performance, dance party, parade and public transport facilities with a drug detector dog
Drug detection dogs and nightlife settings

This legislation allows police to enter premises and search and question patrons – something they were previously not legally able to do.

Nightlife settings – pubs, clubs, dance events and festivals – are now regularly targeted and the presence of large numbers of police officers and teams of dogs is not an unusual occurrence.

This has significantly affected the relationship between the nightlife industry and local police.
What have they found?

Comparison of 'drugs found'/'not found' by main location type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total indications</th>
<th>%Where drugs found</th>
<th>% Where no drugs found</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public transport</td>
<td>6423</td>
<td>25% (1586)</td>
<td>75% (4837)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed premises</td>
<td>2125</td>
<td>23% (484)</td>
<td>77% (1641)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Party</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>39% (94)</td>
<td>61% (146)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road/street</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>37% (436)</td>
<td>63% (757)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gross weights of drugs located by drug detection dogs – main drug types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Total (g)</th>
<th>Highest recorded amount (g)</th>
<th>Median (g)</th>
<th>Average (g)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>9731.31</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meth/amphetamine</td>
<td>306.2</td>
<td>41g (31.3g net)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>25.99</td>
<td>5.2g (0.49g net)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>407.64</td>
<td>30.9g (1.5g net)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>13.24</td>
<td>4.3g (1.27g net)</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSW Ombudsman, 2006 (Derived from the Results Spreadsheet, 22 February 2002 to 21 February 2004)
Police arrested 42 revellers for drug possession at the Parklife music festival. Partygoers were caught with cocaine, ecstasy and cannabis.

More than 60 uniformed and plainclothes officers and two police dogs patrolled the event. Victoria Police said about one arrest was made for every five people searched.

 Acting Insp Brown said. "Even if a person had drugs in their pockets the night before, or have residue on them, the dogs will detect it."

 Officers then search the person, including all items on them. "We are finding girls with pills stuffed in their hair, cannabis stuffed in the back of phones, drugs concealed in sunscreen bottles and gum packets - we've seen everything."

(Sunday Herald Sun, September 25, 2011)
Drug detection dogs

2006 - Ombudsmen released a report on the use of sniffer dogs in NSW

- it found that drug detection dogs have a 27% 'success rate' in identifying people in possession of illegal drugs
- 1-2.5% of all people identified by the dogs are drug dealers
- 73% of people identified by the dogs did not have drugs

The report recommended whether the Act should be retained. The NSW Government rejected the findings

Sniffer dogs are now used in most jurisdictions across Australia
How have they been used?

Many complaints made by those subjected to searches who did not have drugs:

"I feel really upset by the whole ordeal as I was treated as if I was a criminal. I am an honest, law abiding citizen of NSW. I have a perfect driving record and have never been in trouble with the police before. ...Once they had finished they just walked off without saying anything. No apology or thanks for my time. All my belongings were left on the pool table for everyone to see. I really feel 6 police could be used more effectively catching people breaking the law rather than harassing people like myself, minding their own business. As far as I'm concerned, the police will get no help from me in the future"

(NSW Ombudsman Report, 2006)
How have they been used?

This description of an operation from a young girl attending a dance event:

"It was the most terrifying thing I have ever experienced. We went to The Big Day Out and passed through the ticket gate. It was only then, after we had gone through, that we could see that there were sniffer dogs being used to search everyone going in. It was too late for anyone to do anything but be caught up in this. People all around me were panicking. I had one ecstasy tablet in my wallet and I was totally freaked about what I should do. My friend encouraged me to relax and walk through, which I did. But there were others who decided to take their drugs there on the spot – and I'm sure some people took whatever they had on them. It was very scary – wondering what would happen to me and worried about others who might seriously have gotten really sick"

(NSW Ombudsman Report, 2006)
Drug detection dogs

The NSW Ombudsman Report found that the use of dogs "has proven to be an ineffective tool for detecting drug dealers. Overwhelmingly the use of drug detection dogs has led to public searches of individuals in which no drugs were found, or to the detection of (mostly young) adults in possession of very small amounts of cannabis for personal use."

In 2002-03 – the police drug detection dog unit, consisting of 14 dogs, cost $868,037.39. Using those costs, it has been estimated that each successful 'supply' prosecution in 2003-04 cost over $90,000
So do they change behaviour?

The EDRS collects information from regular ecstasy users (REUs) and has collected limited information on their experiences with drug detection 'sniffer' dogs.

The 2007 EDRS found 39% had seen sniffer dogs at events in the previous 6 months, with 70% taking some sort of precaution to avoid detection.

- hiding drugs better
- consuming drugs before the event
- not taking drugs to the event
- purchasing drugs at the event
- using different undetectable drugs
Do they change behaviour?

In the 2010 EDRS, REUs were questioned again about sniffer dogs and behaviour had changed slightly.

Of those who had drugs in their possession when they saw the dogs (41% of the national sample):

- 78% kept doing what they were doing
- 8% consumed their drugs
- 2% gave their drugs to another person to carry
- 1% threw away their drugs
- 11% reported taking another action

(Sindicich & Burns, 2011)
Percentage of regular ecstasy users (REU) reporting seeing sniffer dogs in past six months

Ecstasy and Related Drug Reporting System (EDRS) 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>54</td>
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Sniffer dog activity reported by REU in past six months: Were they in possession of drugs at the time?
Ecstasy and Related Drug Reporting System (EDRS) 2010

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Seen Sniffer Dogs</th>
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<td>Tas</td>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>NT</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>Qld</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
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</table>

DARTA Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
Do they change behaviour?

Twenty participants (3% of the EDRS national sample) reported being searched by police in the preceding 6 months due to a sniffer dog

- the majority (75%, n=15) had no drugs found on them and were let go
- four participants were found to be in possession of drugs
  - two were arrested and charged
  - two were fined and/or cautioned

(Sindicich & Burns, 2011)
Drug detection dogs

What impact has 10 years of the strategy had on Australian nightlife?
What has changed?

People have not stopped taking drugs – it appears that they have simply changed the way they take drugs or now use different drugs – i.e., GHB, LSD

Dogs do not appear to have been successful at targeting dealers or suppliers – those that do risk detection can make large profits when in venues

Relationships with local police has been damaged

There is still great confusion about or dogs operate and what they are legally able to do – the nightlife environment has changed

15,779 searches conducted in 2010, 5087 actually had drugs
Do people know their rights?

There have been no education campaigns around this law enforcement strategy.

Every jurisdiction has slightly different legislation and procedures – although it is difficult to get accurate information.

Most young people are unaware of the process involved if a sniffer dog approaches them – it is important that young people know the process and their rights.

Extremely difficult to obtain this information from police services.

DARTA Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
Residential Services

Sniff Dogs, the discreet way to confirm or refute the presence of drugs in your home.

In today’s complex society, in which pervasive influences (e.g., the Internet, movies and ever-present peer pressure) portray drugs as glamorous and even harmless. A parent can never be entirely certain whether their kids have been induced to experiment, for caring parent can afford to let experimentation lead to casual use and allow it to escalate to more dangerous substance abuse. Early intervention is widely regarded as the key to prevention, and intervention at any time is better than remaining, as the kids say, “closed.”

Educational Services

A Drug Free School

Maintaining a drug-free school campus is a constant challenge for school administrations. The best approach is to address the issue from several angles, drug detection being one of them. Like any form of prevention, the deterrent must be visible, consistent and enforced.

Sniff Dogs services school systems with regular frequent campus visits, randomised locations, expertise, and is non-disruptive to the students. Our services are cost-effective and campus-wide. A “Sniff” finds the drugs.

Studies affirm drug use leads to poor academic performance

Researchers found that the frequency of the use of alcohol and marijuana during the past month was related to academic performance. Of students reporting an A or B average:

- 12.2% were students who did not use marijuana in the past month, as compared with 56% of those who used marijuana in the past month and 49.4% of those who used marijuana on 5 or more days during the past month.

- 75.5% were students who did not use alcohol during the past month as compared with 67.1% of those who used (but did not binge on) alcohol in the past month and 57.7% of those who engaged in past month binge alcohol use. (The MADD Report, Issue 21)

Drug detection dogs

Suspicious of Your Teen? Hire a Drug-Sniffing Dog

Where to next?
Extending police use of drug detection dogs

In February 2007, new police powers introduced to allow police to stop vehicles in a specified area and use dogs to carry out general drug detection

The 12 month trial costing in excess of $300K (23 operations, involving 624 police and 48 dogs) resulted in only seven indictable seizures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screens and searches</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Cost/resourcing</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93 vehicles searched, 7 vehicles searched, 2 persons searched</td>
<td>0 positive searches NIL Drugs</td>
<td>19 officers, 1 drug dog Total: $25,091.65</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Act was repealed on 8 July 2011 after being seen as "not effective"
Sniffer Dogs Australia provide Drug Detector Teams (DDT`s) to carry out detection sweeps of all areas of the school, including lockers, bags, grounds, seldom used buildings, toilets and persons as requested. All work is performed with a member of the school staff present. If drugs are detected the handler will then advise the school staff member, and the drug detector team will re commence the sweep.

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Drug detection dogs

Do we really want to see them in schools?