



NOTHING ABOUT US- WITHOUT US!

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The Secretary
Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

23 April 2021

**INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE
TOURISM AND EVENTS SECTORS**

Dear Secretary,

Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors.

HRVic will focused its comments on the impact on music events and festivals across Victoria.

HRVic would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on this written submission.

Kind regards,

Stephanie Tzanetis
DanceWize Program Director, Harm Reduction Victoria

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Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic) and DanceWize Program Background

Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic, formerly VIVAIDS Inc.) is a registered health promotion charity that receives Department of Health (DHS) funding. Incorporated in 1987 (as VIVAIDS), HRVic played a key role in mobilising the community of people who inject drugs (PWID) in response to the threat of HIV/AIDS. Over the past thirty years, HRVic has taken on a wider brief of health issues relating to alcohol and other drug (AOD) use. HRVic is part of a national network which is able to support the emergence of similar programs in other parts of the country too. This network promotes health rights, human rights and harm reduction.

One of Harm Reduction Victoria's program's that started as a community-led initiative and came under HRVic's administration in 1999 is 'DanceWize'. DanceWize is a harm reduction peer education and support outreach program at music events and festivals. For music events and festivals DanceWize delivers the following services:

- Pre-event consultation with event organisers regarding matters such as AOD-related policies and communications planning;
- Pre-event training for event personnel;
- Onsite resource table for education, service referrals, and where free health supplies like sexual health, earplugs, or sunscreen is provided;
- Onsite chill space where care and support is provided for intoxicated people (or those otherwise needing support) and who do not require a medical intervention;
- roving crowd care to promote self-care and observe for patrons on the edge of requiring an intervention and/or referral;
- Post-event participation in event debrief meetings with permit issuer; and
- Post-event

DanceWize operates like a public-private partnership, with the funding HRVic receives from DHS covering the program's core expenses (wages and corporate services) and event organisers contribute a fee for service that cover outreach expenses, including overtime or time off in lieu accrued by staff working after hours, on weekends, and public holidays. The fee for service from event organisers represents approximately 10-20% of the DanceWize program's overall budget.

The scale of events that DanceWize delivers services for varies immensely from community-led events with a few hundred people to large-scale commercial events, with a patronage of more than 5, 10, 20, 30,000 people. Single-day or multi-day format. With or without liquor licensing. Regional and metropolitan. Niche events for key populations like the LGTQI+ community or school leavers events; 18+ only and all ages. Depending on such variations and scale of DanceWize onsite services at an event, our fee for service ranges from \$200 to <\$10,000 including GST.

In 2017-18 we delivered onsite services for 27 events; in 2018-19 for 44 events; in 2019-20 for 38 events and 9 in the last quarter were cancelled due to Covid. Each year >50% of these events were >5,000 patrons.

DanceWize services during COVID restrictions / Covid Safe conditions and the health risks associated with uncontrolled events

In 2020-21 we have delivered services at 9 Victorian 'events'. 5 of these events have been ticketed, covid-safe events, subject to event planning processes such as venue licensing requirements or Place of Public Entertainment (POPE) permits. All 5 events have been with less than 5,000 patrons. As the Committee is most-likely aware, events have always operated with significant overhead business costs, and now it appears these have increased due to the need to ensure compliance with Covid safe measures and the decrease in ticket sales due to crowd restrictions. We have provided 6 quotes to event organisers who made booking inquiries with DanceWize that range between \$200-2500 to deliver the DanceWize service and these were declined due to there not being budget for such an expense. Some of those 6 events were ultimately cancelled, some went ahead without a harm reduction service as part of their event planning

The remaining 4 'events' that DanceWize has delivered services at this financial year were part of our modified operations plan where our service model is applied to 'social hotspots', such as parks and coastal areas. On one occasion when DanceWize delivered services at a social hotspot we were informed through communication with the local government authority's Parks Department that their informed estimate was that 7,000 people visited that park within a single day. During such service delivery DanceWize program staff and volunteers observed concerning behaviour, such as anti-social behaviour such as throwing glass bottles, high levels of intoxication and/or lowered levels of tolerance, increased social anxiety and overwhelm, people not having access to an adequate number of bathroom facilities, food vendors, access to drinking water, and people in vulnerable states being stranded with limited transport options. Through our network of peer-based volunteers we are aware of numerous unregulated events occurring in a range of settings fitting the profile of the unregulated social hotspot 'event's described here.

Anecdotally, of the ~30 event promotion companies that have engaged the DanceWize service in recent years, approximately 2/3 are not currently operational and it seems it may not be a financially viable option for about half of those companies (1/3 of the total) to run events ever again. Several individual contractors who we have worked with for several years have had to change industries to maintain a livelihood. While it is disappointing for our team to lose supportive stakeholders that we have built up positive working relationships, we are also concerned about the loss to the industry as a whole, and what this will mean in terms of safety standards and other quality measures. Events are critical to our economy and they also provide social spaces for celebration and community connection within a setting that has been planned in terms of safety and other amenities. Australian music events and festivals are generally recognised as being of the highest standard, and this is especially so for Melbourne. We urge the Committee to recommend all necessary measures are taken to support the financial-sustainability of music events and festivals, not simply for economic reasons, but so the public has entertainment options that have been organised with health, safety and wellness as paramount considerations.