

The Use of Strip Searches & Drug Dogs in NSW

A Report on 10 Years of
Police Data (2014-2023)

July 2025



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About this report

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This report is a collaborative project between Harm Reduction Australia and the Redfern Legal Centre. It compiles and analyses ten years of data provided by the NSW Police to the NSW Parliament in 2025 as a result of the Greens NSW.

Executive Summary

This report summarises ten years of data on strip searches and drug dog detection in New South Wales and makes recommendations for change.

Because data on strip searches and the breakdown of drugs found during these searches is not publicly available, Redfern Legal Centre attempted to obtain this information through the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* but was unsuccessful.

The data was eventually obtained from Harm Reduction Australia via Cate Faehrmann MLC of the Greens NSW via Questions on Notice, a formal way for Members of Parliament to compel the release of detailed written information.

It revealed that between 2014 and 2023, NSW Police reported conducting 82,471 strip searches.

Out of 82,471 strip searches over ten years, illicit substances were found in only 11,136 cases (13.5%), resulting in 71,335 (86.5%) strip searches that found nothing.

From this total of 82,471 people who were strip searched, 6,716 or 8.14% were subjected to this search because of a positive indication from a drug dog.

Of these 6,716 individuals strip searched following a positive indication, only 2,713 or 40.4% were found to have any illicit substances, with the vast majority being minor drug possession.

In 2006, the NSW Ombudsman reviewed the power to use drug detection dogs to aid police officers in the detection of drug offences, and found *“the use of drug detection 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 minimal amounts of cannabis for personal use.”*¹

Yet the NSW Police continue to use this ineffective,² inequitable,³ risky,⁴ and statistically inaccurate, strategy which has been found to ‘exacerbate health and social harms to ... already marginalised group[s] ... [and] conflict[s] with Australia’s national drug strategy objective of harm minimisation, and with Australia’s commitments under human rights laws to provide access to health care and to protect individuals, families and communities from drug related harm’.⁵

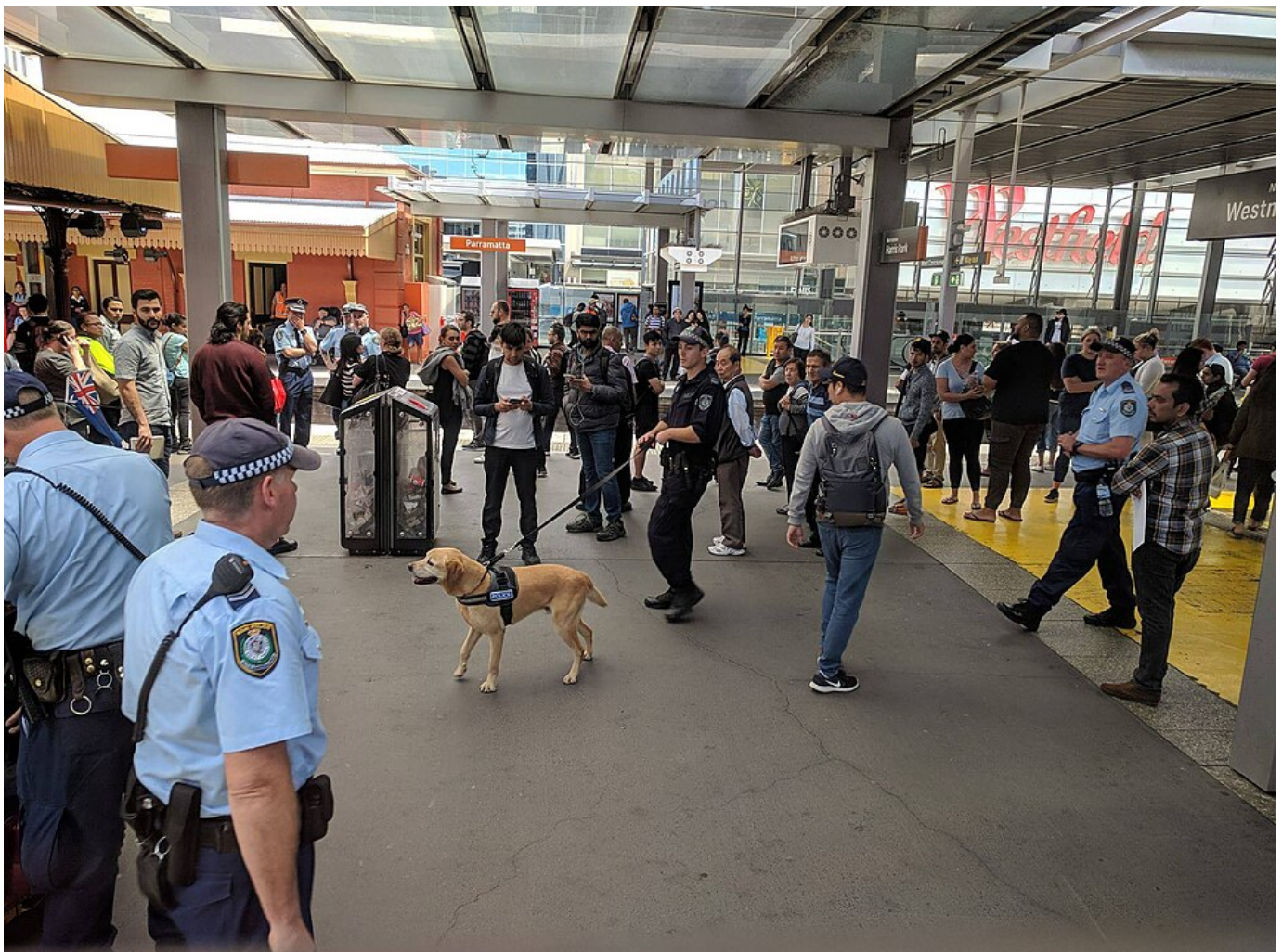
Evidence shows that strip searches are conducted at significantly higher rates on First Nations people. These searches are also more frequently carried out in or near First Nations communities, with some regional areas and specific train stations showing a notably higher rate.

The use of strip searches disproportionately targets First Nations people, and this over-policing undermines more effective public health approaches to drug use and creates justifiable mistrust of the police.

There is strong legal and illicit drug policy evidence and analysis to conclude that strip searching is not only highly ineffective but also targets young and vulnerable people in our community and has mental health impacts that are entirely avoidable.

Evidence also demonstrates that harm reduction measures are more effective to address drug use than criminalisation, including the use of strip searching.

The assumed costs associated with strip searching including financial and personnel costs and impact on the community are not proportionate to the purported aim of keeping the community safe - and in fact often do not increase community safety.



Drug Detection Dog Parramatta, photograph via Sniff Off

Recommendations

The NSW Government & NSW Police:

1

End the use of strip searches conducted based on suspicion of minor drug possession.

2

End all strip searches of children under 18 years of age.

3

Cease the use of drug dogs at festivals, events and venues.

4

Publicly release annual data on the number and outcomes of strip searches conducted each year.

5

Mandate the offer of diversion alternatives to all persons caught with personal use amounts of any illicit drug.

6

Disclose the annual financial and personnel costs incurred by NSW Police in maintaining and deploying the drug detection dogs including any impact on community safety and wellbeing.

7

Introduce evidence-based drug reforms and expand harm reduction programs as a matter of urgency.

Legal Perspective

The New South Wales Police Force's Drug Detection Dog (DDD) Deployment Standard Operational Procedure⁶ explicitly outlines that an alert alone cannot provide a legal basis for police to conduct a search:

“You must understand that the indication of the DDD alone does not constitute ‘reasonable grounds’ to conduct a search upon an individual. You must conduct further investigations, such as asking questions as well as observing their appearance and demeanour prior to determining that ‘reasonable grounds’ exists to conduct a search.”⁷

Academics Dr Vicki Sentas and Dr Michael Grewcock observe in their article, ‘Strip Searches, Police Power, and the Infliction of Harm: An Analysis of the New South Wales Strip Search Regime’, that the rise in the use of strip searches over the past two decades is not due to changes in legislation, but a shift in NSW Police policy:

“However, the rise of strip searches is not facilitated by new legislation. Instead, we are confronted with a significant shift in police operational practice facilitated by the expansion of drug detection dog powers in 2012 but rooted in longstanding statutory capacities to conduct personal and strip searches since 2005. LEPR expanded the common law approach from fundamentally limiting police power protecting individual liberty to a ‘balancing’ between individual rights

Raya Meredith was at one of Australia’s biggest music festivals when a drug dog sniffed in her direction. The dog then walked on, the New South Wales Supreme Court recently heard, but police officers stopped her. They took her bag and searched it.

The 27-year-old, who was postpartum at the time, was then taken into a makeshift tarpaulin, where a female police officer asked her to take all her clothes off, bend over and bare her bottom, drop her breasts and remove her tampon. At one point, a male officer walked in unannounced.

The search found no drugs and nothing else illegal.

“It was a horrible thing to go through,” Meredith said in emotional testimony on the first day of a class action against the State of NSW about strip searches at NSW music festivals.

But so too, Meredith told the court, was the “gaslighting” she endured for years by the police force who denied her version of events, until just before the class action hearing commenced, leaving her feeling “violated, yet again”.

Source: The Guardian – 19 May 2025
[‘Absolutely no evidence’: how NSW police backflipped on unlawful strip-search](#) | [Australian police and policing](#) | [The Guardian](#)

and crime control. The surge in strip searches rests upon, and in turn shapes, institutionalised police interpretations of vaguely worded legal powers that authorise broad police discretion. Rather than acting as the detached enforcers of the law, the police are active agents in its construction, regenerating the purpose and enlarging the scope of the law.”

Most strip searches are conducted based on suspicion of minor drug possession. Sentas and Grewcock argue:

“The proliferation of strip searching is sustained in law by the construction of ‘supply’ within the Drugs Misuse and Trafficking Act (DMTA). The deeming provisions in s29 of the DMTA, which create a legal burden on an accused in possession of scheduled trafficable quantities to rebut a presumption of supply, encourage police to use reasonable suspicion of possession as reasonable suspicion of potential supply and to maintain a misleading public narrative that strip searching targets supply.”⁸

NSW Police have powers to conduct strip searches under section 31(b) of the *Law Enforcement (Power and Responsibilities) Act 2002* (NSW) (LEPRA):

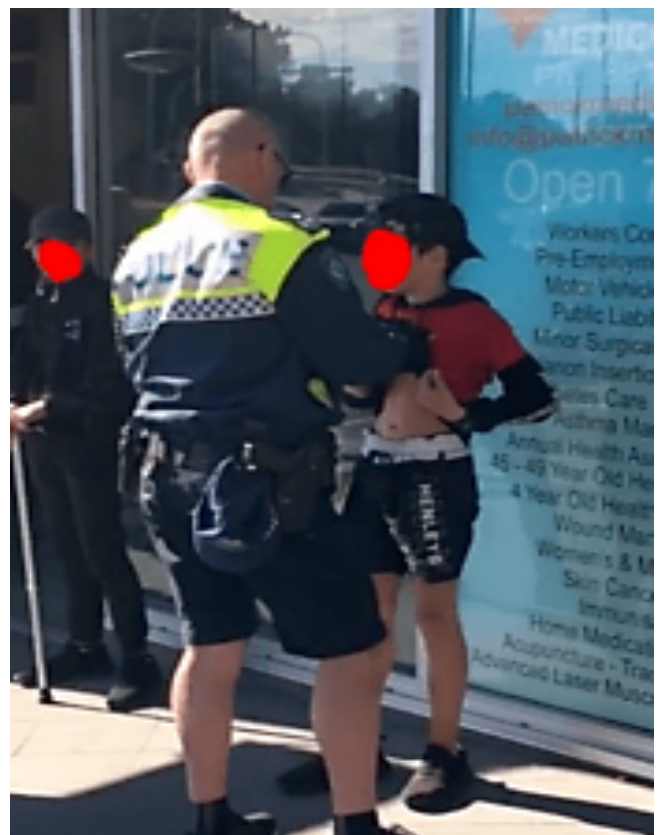
“A police officer may carry out a strip search of a person if—

(b) in the case where the search is carried out in any other place—the police officer suspects on reasonable grounds that the strip search is necessary for the purposes of the search and that the seriousness and urgency of the circumstances make the strip search necessary.”

Police may also conduct a strip search on a child who is at least 10 years of age but under 18 years of age.⁹

During a full-body strip search, police can require the removal of all clothing. According to section 32(5) of LEPRA, police officers must conduct the least invasive form of search that is practical under the circumstances. Despite this, Redfern Legal Centre has reported numerous instances where clients were required not only to remove all their clothing—sometimes in public places—but were also controversially directed by NSW Police to squat, cough, and, in some cases, remove a tampon.

The high number of reported strip searches conducted by NSW Police suggests they have become a routine part of policing.



Strip Searching, photograph via Sniff Off

A major factor contributing to the high number of strip searches in NSW is a strong emphasis on ‘proactive policing’, whereby police use strategies that attempt to prevent potential crime before it occurs. This has resulted in the widespread use of drug dogs. This includes the wrongful use of a drug dog’s alert to justify establishing reasonable grounds under Section 21 of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act (LEPRA) and the subsequent decision to conduct a strip search.¹⁰

Recent academic research indicates that police drug dogs are an ineffective and inequitable strategy, which may pose health, social, and legal risks. Yet the NSW Police Force continue to use this ineffective,¹¹ inequitable,¹² risky,¹³ statistically inaccurate, and systematically deviant strategy which has been found to ‘exacerbate health and social harms to ... already marginalised group[s] ... [and] conflict[s] with Australia’s national drug strategy objective of harm minimisation, and with Australia’s commitments under human rights laws to provide access to health care and to protect individuals, families and communities from drug related harm’.¹⁴



Photography by Paul Miller/Drug Detection Dog Sydney via AAP

Police quota system

It is difficult to ignore the relationship between the high number of strip searches conducted from 2016 to 2018 and the personal search quota system that was implemented by NSW Police during that time.

In 2020, documents obtained under freedom of information laws by Greens NSW MP David Shoebridge revealed that police had set a goal to conduct 241,632 personal searches across the state as part of the Command Performance Accountability System (COMPASS). They came close to achieving this target, performing over 238,900 personal searches, which included both standard “frisk” searches and strip searches, in the 2018-2019 period.¹⁵

Illicit Drug Policy Implications



Photograph via izismile.com

Evidence has demonstrated that there needs to be a shift away from punitive strategies towards harm reduction and early intervention strategies.

In February 2024, the Minns Labor Government introduced the Early Drug Diversion Initiative (EDDI). Under this police-based diversion initiative, individuals in possession of a small quantity of a prohibited drug or items for drug administration can receive a \$400 fine instead of a charge. These fines can then be paid or resolved by completing a tailored drug intervention program.¹⁶

This is a welcome attempt to move towards treating illicit drug use through a health lens and diverting low-level drug offenders away from the criminal justice system. Recently obtained data, however, revealed that since the scheme's inception in February 2024 through to August 2024, police chose to charge individuals 6,332 times, while opting to divert only 436 people.¹⁷

That is, only 6.9% of people caught with personal use quantities were offered the option to access the diversion program with more than 93% of those caught being criminalised.¹⁸

The Aboriginal Legal Service raised concerns with the discretionary nature of diversion programs given that “a recent *NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research* study found that 12% of Aboriginal adults with a small amount of cannabis were cautioned by NSW Police, compared to 44% of non-Aboriginal adults”.¹⁹ Likewise, within the EDDI program, First Nations people were 4.5 times more likely to be charged.²⁰

Stringent enforcement measures have also been maintained at music festivals, allowing drug dog operations and strip searches to continue. These practices are often framed as deterrents, but this adherence to punitive approaches regarding illicit drug use contradicts multiple recommendations against the use of these practices.

This is further evident within the Australian ‘drug budget’ 2021/22 report, in which 64.3% of expenditure is shown to be allocated to law enforcement measures, whereas only 1.6% is allocated to harm reduction measures.²¹ The disproportionate expenditure towards law enforcement further exemplifies the imbalance that governments prioritise a punitive approach to drug use.

Becca, a 22-year old traveller on a working holiday visa, had been living in Australia for around 15 months when she attended the 2017 Lost Paradise festival on the Central Coast of NSW.

As Becca stood with her friends waiting to enter the festival, two NSW Police officers were walking up and down the line with a sniffer dog. As they walked past Becca, the dog sat down next to her. The officers told Becca they suspected she was carrying an illegal substance and asked her to consent to a search.

"I felt I had no choice but to comply, otherwise I'd be left stranded in the middle of nowhere, with no way of getting home," Becca said.

Becca knew she hadn't done anything wrong but felt incredibly nervous. She didn't know much about the law, and had not had her rights explained to her. A male police officer handed Becca over to a female officer to be searched and said: "Go easy on her, I don't think she's got anything on her."

Becca was led into a police transit van to be searched. The windshield had been left uncovered and she could see three male police officers standing just outside. The female officer asked Becca to lift up her top. Becca told the officer that she wasn't wearing a bra. The officer followed Becca's gaze around to the male officers outside and said, "Just do it quickly".

The officer asked Becca if she was on her period, and when she said yes, told her: "We still have to do this." Becca was then directed to drop, squat and cough. The female officer looked underneath her and peered at her tampon. "I felt numb all over," Becca said.

"I was just so aware that people could look in. My main concern was the male police officers being so close at the time. There was no real privacy... It just felt very perverted, to be honest. I had done nothing wrong. I felt violated like I was just another body and not a human being," she said.

After she left the van, Becca returned to her friends and began sobbing uncontrollably. That night she coped with the trauma by drinking. "My anxiety got much worse after I was strip-searched," Becca said.

"I've never spoken publicly about what happened before because I didn't want to relive the trauma. I also didn't think there was anyone I could tell."

Source: [Strip searched at a festival: Becca's story | Redfern Legal Centre](#)

In 2024, the NSW Government held a multi-day summit focused on improving the health and wellbeing of communities and individuals affected by drug use.

One of the recommendations from the resulting report was to:

"Cease the use of drug detection dogs and strip searches for suspected drug possession during the current trial of drug-checking services at music festivals, with consideration given to extending this approach to all music festivals."

Despite the recommendation, drug dogs were deployed throughout the Midnight Mafia 2025 festival.²² The actions were justified by Premier Chris Minns who stated that the removal of police and drug dogs at festivals will lead to an increase in drug consumption.²³

The impacts of the deployment of drug dogs and the utilisation of strip searches are the antithesis of what addressing illicit drug use (regardless of the approach) seeks to achieve. It was found that the presence of police and drug dogs at music festivals actually encourages (rather than deterring) risky drug taking behaviours as festival goers aim “to avoid detection while still being able to consume drugs”.²⁴

In a Coronial Inquest into the death of six patrons of NSW music festivals, Dr Peta Malin explained that festival goers described deploying one or more of the following adaptations to their drug-taking behaviour at music festivals: panicked ingestion, preloading (taking larger quantities of drugs prior to arriving at festival), packing (internal concealment of drugs), buying inside, and changing drugs.²⁵

This is supported by research that finds a limited deterrence effect of the visibility of drug dogs and notes similar risky drug-consumption occurred upon sighting the dogs.²⁶

Additionally, the presence of police and drug dogs removes confidence in the use of pill testing services at festivals due to a lack of trust. This is demonstrated by the reduced sample size of tested drugs at the NSW pill testing trial festival,²⁷ in which police presence was made well known.²⁸

Therefore, the presence of police and drug dogs not only encourages risky drug-taking behaviours but also deters the use of harm reduction services like pill testing. The effects of this could lead, and have led, to health harms, including overdose and drug-induced death.^{29,30}

Policies must adapt to reduce the harm, as opposed to current punitive responses, which incite harmful risk-taking behaviours around drug use.



Photography by Mark Metcalfe/Festival Drug Dog via Getty Images

Strip searches have been described as an *“inherently humiliating and degrading”* violation of the right to bodily integrity for any person.³¹ The individual being searched is isolated, required to undress in a confined setting, and subjected to intimidating and coercive questioning. Multiple music festival attendees who have been subjected to a strip search have described the procedure to be completely humiliating³² and *“horrible because you haven't done anything wrong”*,³³ describing an *“overwhelming sense of powerlessness”*.³⁴ For these individuals, the psychological impacts can be long-lasting. Victims of strip searches have likened the trauma to that of sexual assault. Strip searches can also re-traumatise individuals

First Nations peoples are disproportionately targeted by police with drug dogs and strip searches. Data obtained by Redfern Legal Centre revealed that *“the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being strip searched was 9% (2020-21) and 11% (2021-24/5/22)”* which was around 3 times the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in NSW (3.4%).³⁶

Additionally, the data showed that strip searches were more likely to occur in or near First Nations communities, with Dubbo recording the highest number of strip searches in any regional area.³⁷ Strip searches were also 6.5 times more likely to take place at Redfern train station compared to Central or Kings Cross stations.³⁸



Photography by Angela Wylie via Sydney Morning Herald

who have experienced sexual assault. In most cases, these searches are conducted with little regard for the mental health and well-being of the person involved.

For example, in one instance, a teenage music festival patron was allegedly threatened by a police officer who said the strip search would be made 'nice and slow', if she did not reveal where she was hiding drugs.³⁵

These statistics reveal a recurring injustice towards First Nations people and communities as a result of targeting by police. In some regional towns, the use of these punitive practices against First Nations people has seemingly become a part of police culture and an entrenched routine within policing.³⁹

It is evident that targeting First Nations communities and people with strip searches creates a negative relationship between police and First Nations people and creates unjustified contact with the criminal justice system.

Moreover, strip searches have had a disproportionate and deeply harmful impact on First Nations people (particularly children), which exacerbates the harm often done to the community by the justice system. As previously highlighted, the data consistently reveals an over-policing of First Nations communities and perpetuates patterns of racial profiling and discriminatory assumptions about drug use and criminality. The psychological toll of these procedures is immense for young First Nations people. Not only are they subject to the invasive and traumatic nature of being forcibly disrobed and interrogated, but the experiences are compounded by the context of centuries of state-sanctioned surveillance, violence, and control under colonisation.

This over policing of First Nations communities through strip searches also detracts from more effective public health approaches to drug use. University of Sydney Professor Maree Teesson has highlighted that *“one in four people entering treatment in this country for drug-*

*related issues will be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander,”*⁴⁰ demonstrating a clear need for evidence-based treatment, harm reduction and prevention strategies.

Rather than subjecting First Nations people to invasive and distressing policing practices, resources should be redirected toward culturally safe, community-led interventions that address the root causes of drug-related harms and support healing.

If policy is prioritising harm reduction approaches, such as diversion and pill testing programs, the need for the use of drug dogs and strip searches is contradictory.

To shift towards a more balanced approach and reduce the harm created, problematic punitive measures like drug dogs and strip searching must end.

It is clear that there needs to be significant reform to the government’s approach to illicit drug use in NSW. This could be easily achieved by implementing the recommendations of the 2024 NSW Drug Summit, various coronial inquiries, and reports from NGOs such as the NSW Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies (NADA) where the consensus to effectively adopt a harm reduction approach is clear.



Photography by Mark Metcalfe/Festival Drug Dog via Getty Images

Brooke Hayden, a 27-year-old from Western Sydney, alleges that she was “felt all over” and made to squat and cough.

Speaking about the day, Hayden said she was very excited for the festival. Now, she says she’s terrified to attend Sydney events.

“It’s made me never want to go to an event in Sydney ever again. Until they bring in the pill testing, and people are no longer being harassed by dogs and officers, I will no longer go to an event in Sydney,” she said.

“I don’t want that harassment.

“It was a horrible experience, I definitely don’t want to go through it again.”

Hayden alleges that when she arrived at the festival she was pulled out of the crowd by a police officer who said that a sniffer dog indicated she was carrying illicit substances.

After being patted down and telling the male officer that she didn’t have anything on her, she said two other male officers came and stood on each side of her.

After saying she didn’t have anything on her, she said she threw her bag down in frustration, saying: “Well look at all my stuff, there’s nothing in there.”

“Then the officers, one grabbed me by one arm and the other grabbed me by another arm and they both like ... themselves into me so I wouldn’t run away,” she said.

She said she was then taken to a sectioned off area where she consented to a strip search conducted by two female officers.

“The only reason why I consented to it is because I knew full well I wasn’t in the wrong,”

“I was like, ‘They’re going to strip search me, they’re going to see that I don’t have anything on me, and they’re going to let me back into the event, everything’s gonna be okay.’”

After having to take all her clothes off, she was instructed to put her hands up against the wall.

She was also informed that she was being recorded.

One of the officers – without wearing gloves – then proceeded to touch Hayden’s breasts and touch up and down her whole body.

“No one really wants to be felt up by a police officer,” Hayden said.

She added that the second officer, who was wearing gloves, then slid her hands up her leg and felt between her legs.

“When her hand slid up it was like a really quick, just a finger tip, but she didn’t get her fingers right up there.

“Fingers were definitely in that area and that was definitely enough.”

She claimed she was also made to squat and cough, which NSW Police aren’t allowed to ask of people during a strip search.

“It was honestly disgusting, having someone’s hands all over me,” she said.

Source: [Knockout festival hit by claims of illegal strip search | news.com.au — Australia’s leading news site for latest headlines](https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/news/knockout-festival-hit-by-claims-of-illegal-strip-search/news-story/20230111-123456789)

Key Data

Strip Searches

NSW Police report they conducted 82,471 strip searches in the ten years from January 2014 until December 2023 (see Figure 1 below). On average, this amounts to 8,247 strip searches per year.

- There are concerns about the underreporting of actual search numbers, which suggests that the true total of strip searches might be significantly higher.⁴¹
- From those 82,471 strip searches, an illicit substance was found in just 13.5% (n=11,136) of searches (see Figure 2 below).
- In 86.5% (n=71,335) of searches, no illicit substance was found, resulting in almost nine out of ten searches being unnecessary, and potentially unlawful.

Figure 1: Total strip searches by year (2014 – 2023)

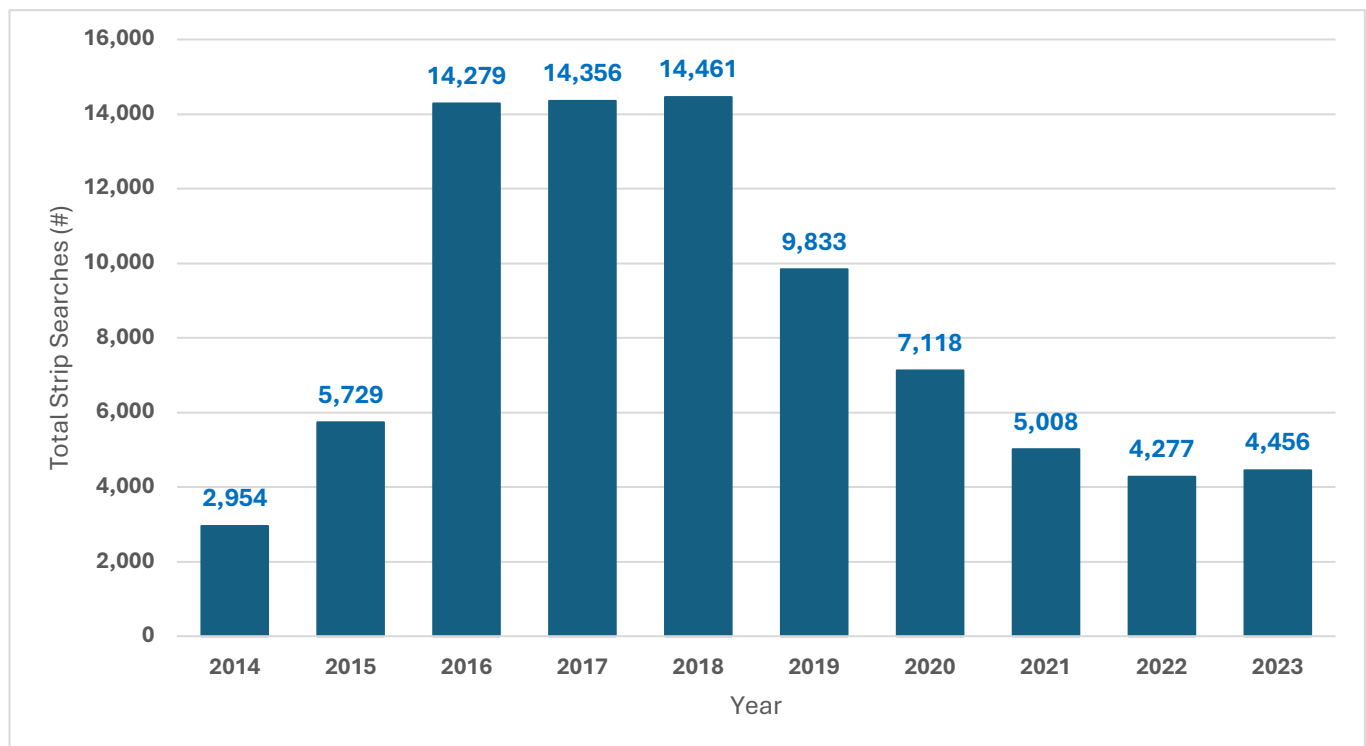
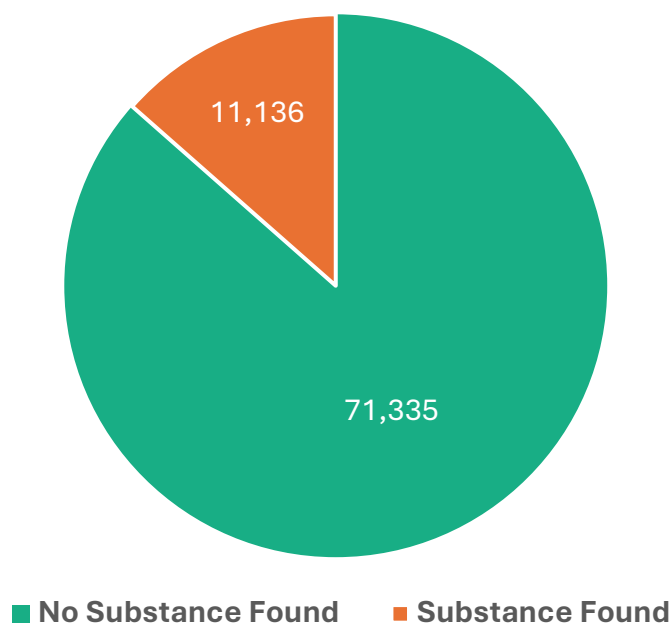


Figure 2: No substance found vs substance found (2014 – 2023)



Strip Searches, Criminal Charges & Convictions

From the 11,136 strip searches that found illicit substances, the following charges were recorded:

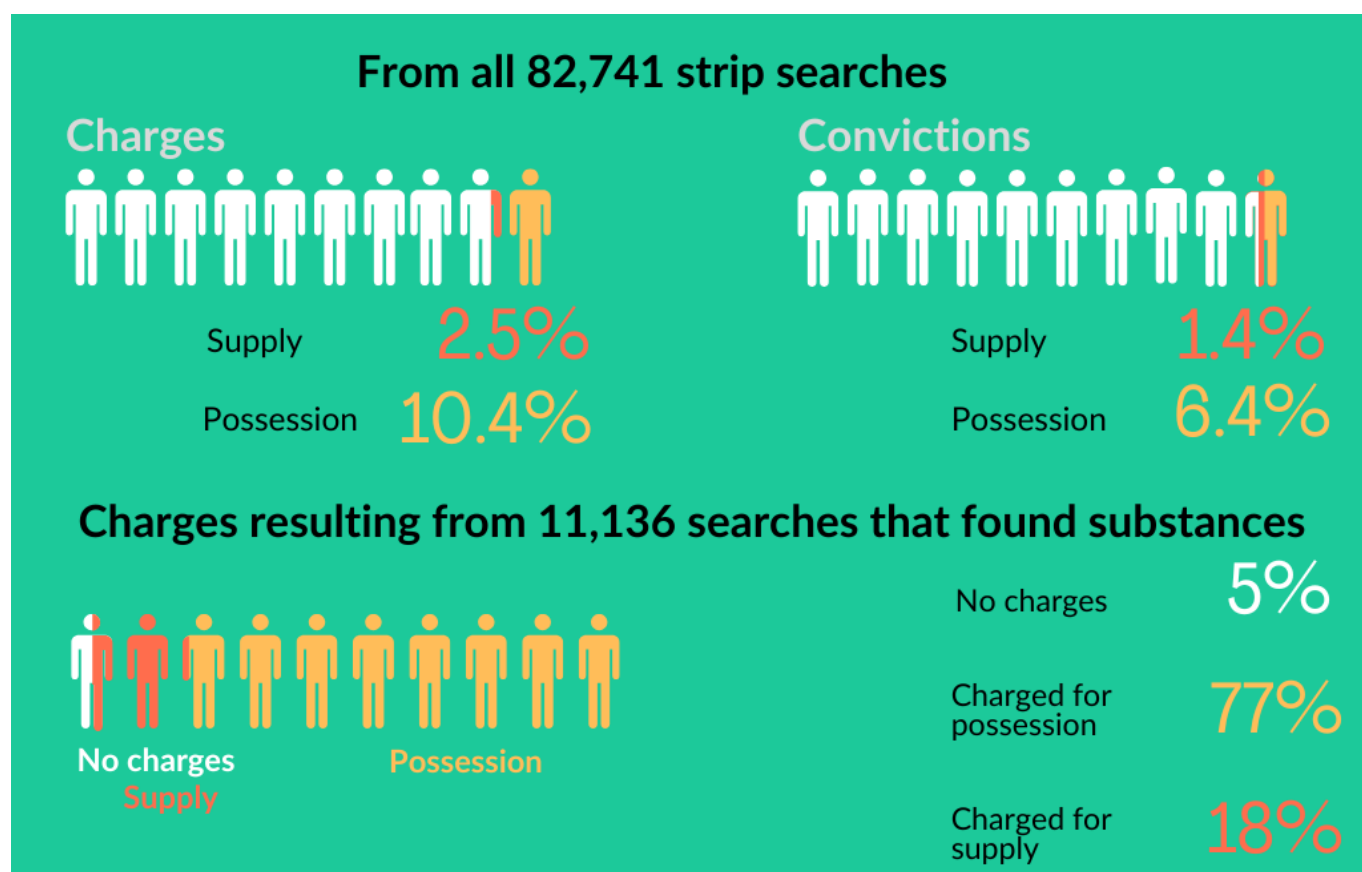
- 8,621 charges for possession of a prohibited drug
- 2,017 charges for supply of a prohibited drug
- 498 of those searches did not result in any charge.

The data shows that only 10.45% of total searches resulted in a possession charge, and only 2.45% of total searches resulted in a supply charge.

From these 10,638 charges for possession or supply of a prohibited drug, the following convictions were recorded:

- 5,321 convictions for possession of a prohibited drug
- 1,182 convictions for supply of a prohibited drug

The data shows that only 6.43% of total searches (n=82,741) resulted in a conviction for possession, and only 1.43% of total searches (n=82,741) resulted in a conviction for supply.



Drug Dog Indications and Charges

Of the total of 82,471 people who were strip searched (see Figure 1 above), 8.14% (n=6,716) were subjected to this search because of a positive indication from a drug dog.

- Of the 6,716 individuals strip searched following a positive drug dog indication, only 40.4% (n=2,713) were found to have any illicit substances, with the vast majority being minor drug possession.
- That is, in six out of ten cases, the drug dogs provided incorrect indications and people were strip searched when not in possession of any illicit substances.
- Of the 2,713 searches where illicit substances were found, 88.13% (n=1,975) were charged with possession of a prohibited drug, while 11.86% (n=266) were charged with the supply of a prohibited drug. Crucially, the data on drug type and specifically the number of cannabis charges compared to other drugs is not provided.
- Of the 2,241 individuals above who were charged for either possession or supply, only 28.05% (n=554) resulted in convictions for possession and only 39.10% (n=104) resulted in convictions for supply.
- This represents only 29.36% of the 2,241 people who were charged with possession or supply of a prohibited drug based on a positive drug dog indication (see Figure 3 below).
- In summary, between 2014 and 2023 a total of only 9.8% (or 658 of the 6,716) individuals that were strip searched due to a positive drug dog indication were also found to have an illicit substance and subsequently convicted of possession or supply of a prohibited drug.

Drug Dog Indications and Charges



8.14%

6,716 searched following positive indication from drug dog.



Of the 6,716 individuals strip searched following positive indication, 2,713 were found to have illicit substances.

60%

Drug dogs provided incorrect indications and people were strip searched.



Of the 6,716 individuals strip searched following positive indication, 658 were convicted of possession or supply of a prohibited drug.

9.8%

Individuals strip searched were convicted.

Figure 3: Charges & Convictions from Drug Dog Indications (2014-2023)

Year	Total Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication	No Substance Found	Substance Found	No Charge	Charge	No Conviction	Conviction
2014	586	354	232	41	191	132	59
2015	619	373	246	25	221	149	72
2016	572	330	242	11	231	150	81
2017	1,093	707	386	30	356	245	111
2018	1,522	1,019	503	13	490	360	130
2019	1,121	732	389	85	304	207	97
2020	285	106	179	76	103	77	26
2021	114	66	48	14	34	18	16
2022	362	172	190	52	138	99	39
2023	442	144	298	125	173	146	27
Total	6,716	4,003	2,713	472	2,241	1,583	658

Appendix: Data and Analysis

The information below provides more detail and analysis from the data provided by NSW Police.

Figure 4: Total strip searches (2014 – 2023)

Year	Total Strip Searches (#)	Total Strip Searches (%)
2014	2,954	3.58%
2015	5,729	6.95%
2016	14,279	17.31%
2017	14,356	17.41%
2018	14,461	17.53%
2019	9,833	11.92%
2020	7,118	8.63%
2021	5,008	6.07%
2022	4,277	5.19%
2023	4,456	5.40%
Total	82,471	100.00%

As shown in Figure 5 below, between 2016 and 2018 there were substantial increases in the number of people being strip searched in NSW.

Figure 5 also shows that between 2019 and 2021, the total number of people being strip searched steadily decreased, most likely due to the COVID-19 lockdown in New South Wales.⁴² However, it is important to note that despite the lockdowns, 2019 and 2020 were the fourth and fifth highest years of the total people being strip searched.

Figure 5: Total strip searches with no substance found vs substance found

Year	No Substance Found (#)	No Substance Found (%)	Substance Found (#)	Substance Found (%)
2014	2,185	73.97%	769	26.03%
2015	4,602	80.33%	1,127	19.67%
2016	13,110	91.81%	1,169	8.19%
2017	13,007	90.60%	1,349	9.40%
2018	12,882	89.08%	1,579	10.92%
2019	8,412	85.55%	1,421	14.45%
2020	5,972	83.90%	1,146	16.10%
2021	4,211	84.09%	797	15.91%
2022	3,485	81.48%	792	18.52%
2023	3,469	77.85%	987	22.15%
Total	71,335	86.50%	11,136	13.50%

Figure 6: No substance found vs substance found

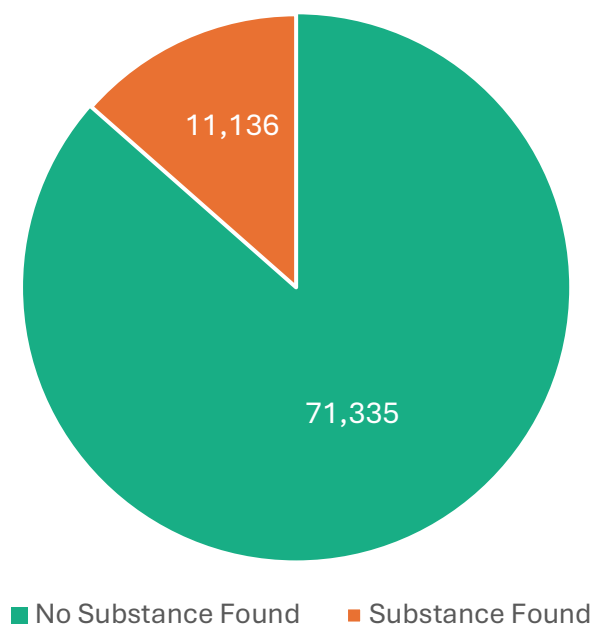
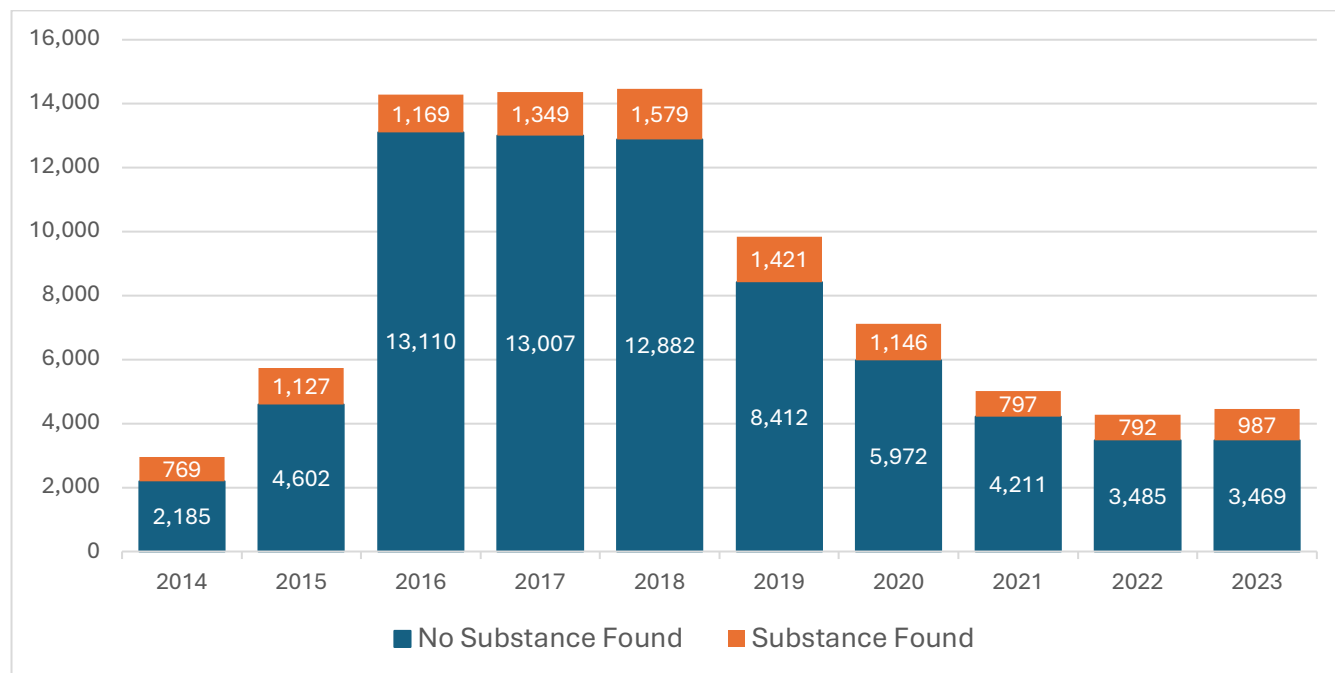


Figure 7: No substance found vs substance found by year



Despite the substantial increase in the number of people being strip searched between 2016 and 2018 there was no real increase in the number of people detected with an illicit substance (see Figure 7 above).

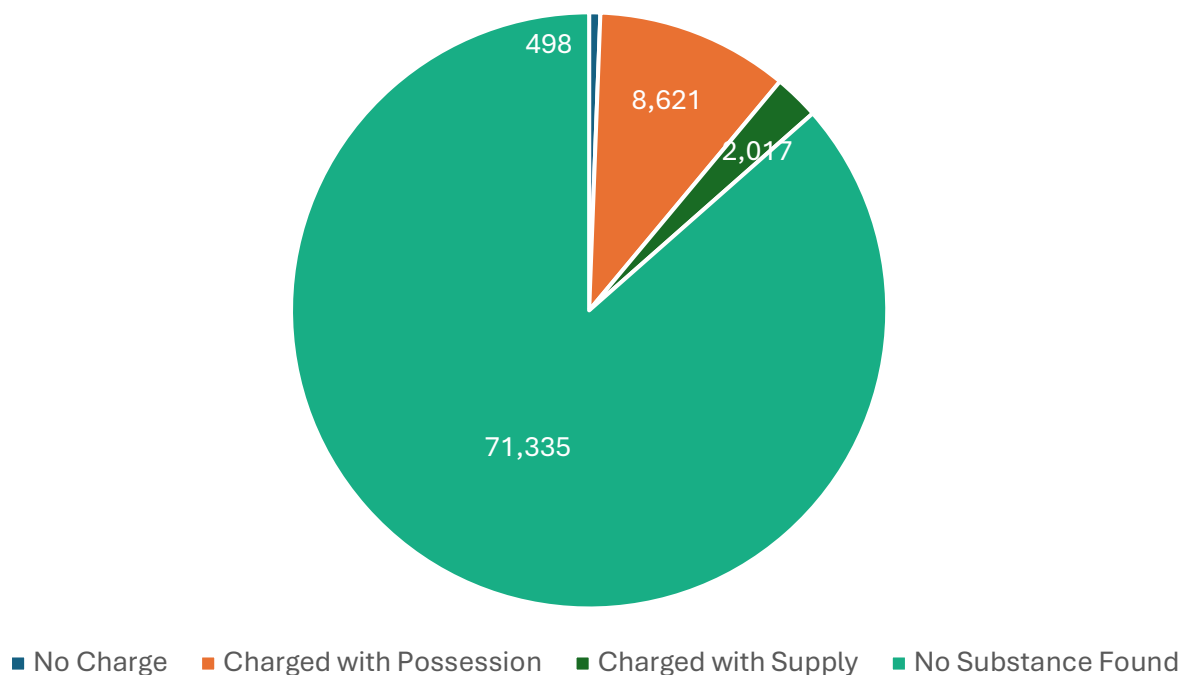
Figure 8: Numbers strip searched & charged with possession or supply of a prohibited drug (2014 – 2023)

Year	Strip Searches (#)	Charged (#)	Charged (%)
2014	2,954	675	22.85%
2015	5,729	1,056	18.43%
2016	14,279	1,133	7.93%
2017	14,356	1,338	9.32%
2018	14,461	1,556	10.75%
2019	9,833	1,350	13.72%
2020	7,118	1,107	15.55%
2021	5,008	798	15.93%
2022	4,277	754	17.63%
2023	4,456	871	19.55%
Total	82,471	10,638	12.89%

Between 2014 and 2018, the rate of individuals who were strip searched and found to have a substance steadily increased. However, since 2019, there has been a decline in the absolute number of people strip searched who were found with an illicit drug (see Figure 8 above).

In the 10 years of data available from 2014, less than 13% of all strip searches resulted in a charge being laid either for possession or supply (see Figure 8 above).

Figure 9: No charge vs charge with possession or supply of a prohibited drug (2014 – 2023)



As shown in Figure 9 above, between 2014 and 2023, over 71,000 people were subjected to a strip search but were not charged with possession or supply of a prohibited drug. As also shown above, in this same 10-year period, only 12.95% (n=10,638) were charged with possession or supply of a prohibited drug from a total of 82,471 strip searches.

Figure 10: Number strip searched & charged with possession of a prohibited drug (2014 – 2023)

Year	Strip Searches (#)	Charged with Possession of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Charged with Possession of a Prohibited Drug Percentage (%)
2014	2,954	584	19.77%
2015	5,729	893	15.59%
2016	14,279	944	6.61%
2017	14,356	1,113	7.75%
2018	14,461	1,327	9.18%
2019	9,833	1,081	10.99%
2020	7,118	857	12.04%
2021	5,008	614	12.26%
2022	4,277	549	12.84%
2023	4,456	659	14.79%
Total	82,471	8,621	10.45%

Although Figure 10 above provides data on how many people were strip searched and charged with possession of a prohibited drug, NSW Police did not provide a breakdown of this data by drug type to understand how many people strip searched and were solely in possession of cannabis. This is important to understand given the availability of the Cannabis Cautioning Scheme⁴³ and the disproportionate level of harm caused by strip searching compared to a charge of cannabis possession.

Figure 11: Number strip searched & charged with supply of a prohibited drug (2014 – 2023)

Year	Strip Searches (#)	Charged with Supply of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Charged with Supply of a Prohibited Drug (%)
2014	2,954	91	3.08%
2015	5,729	163	2.85%
2016	14,279	189	1.32%
2017	14,356	225	1.57%
2018	14,461	229	1.58%
2019	9,833	269	2.74%
2020	7,118	250	3.51%
2021	5,008	184	3.67%
2022	4,277	205	4.79%
2023	4,456	212	4.76%
Total	82,471	2,017	2.45%

It is important to note that not all charges lead to convictions as some charges are not proven or possibly withdrawn. Accordingly, it is appropriate to look at convictions rates from the charges that are a result of a strip search having taken place.

Figure 12: Number strip searched & convicted of possession of a prohibited drug (2014 – 2023)

Year	Strip Searches (#)	Convicted of Possession of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Percentage (%)
2014	2,954	350	6.58%
2015	5,729	600	11.28%
2016	14,279	627	11.78%
2017	14,356	604	11.35%
2018	14,461	667	12.54%
2019	9,833	646	12.14%
2020	7,118	627	11.78%
2021	5,008	484	9.10%
2022	4,277	361	6.78%
2023	4,456	355	6.67%
Total	82,471	5,321	6.45%

The above available data at Figure 12 shows that as little as 6.45% (n=5,321) of people being subjected to a strip search are convicted of possession of a prohibited drug.

Figure 13: Number strip searched & convicted of supply of a prohibited drug (2014 – 2023)

Year	Strip Searches (#)	Conviction for Supply of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Percentage (%)
2014	2,954	51	1.73%
2015	5,729	89	1.55%
2016	14,279	104	0.73%
2017	14,356	127	0.88%
2018	14,461	140	0.97%
2019	9,833	182	1.85%
2020	7,118	157	2.21%
2021	5,008	128	2.56%
2022	4,277	121	2.83%
2023	4,456	83	1.86%
Total	82,471	1,182	1.43%

Figure 13 above shows that only 1.43% (n=1,182) are convicted of supply of a prohibited drug. These figures again bring into question the legitimacy of such an invasive practice being utilized the NSW Police.

Again, the breakdown by drug type is not provided by the NSW Police.

Drug Dog Data

Drug dogs are regularly deployed by the NSW Police at venues, events, festivals and public spaces, including train stations.

The information provided at Figure 14 below indicates that 6,716 strip searches were conducted based on alerts from drug detection dogs suggesting that individuals were in possession of illicit substances. This figure represents over 8% of all searches conducted during the ten-year period from 2014 to 2023.

Figure 14: Total strip searches from drug dog indication (2014 – 2023)

Year	Strip Searches (#)	Total Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication (#)	Percentage (%)
2014	2,954	586	19.84%
2015	5,729	619	10.80%
2016	14,279	572	4.01%
2017	14,356	1,093	7.61%
2018	14,461	1,522	10.52%
2019	9,833	1,121	11.40%
2020	7,118	285	4.00%
2021	5,008	114	2.28%
2022	4,277	362	8.46%
2023	4,456	442	9.92%
Total	82,471	6,716	8.14%

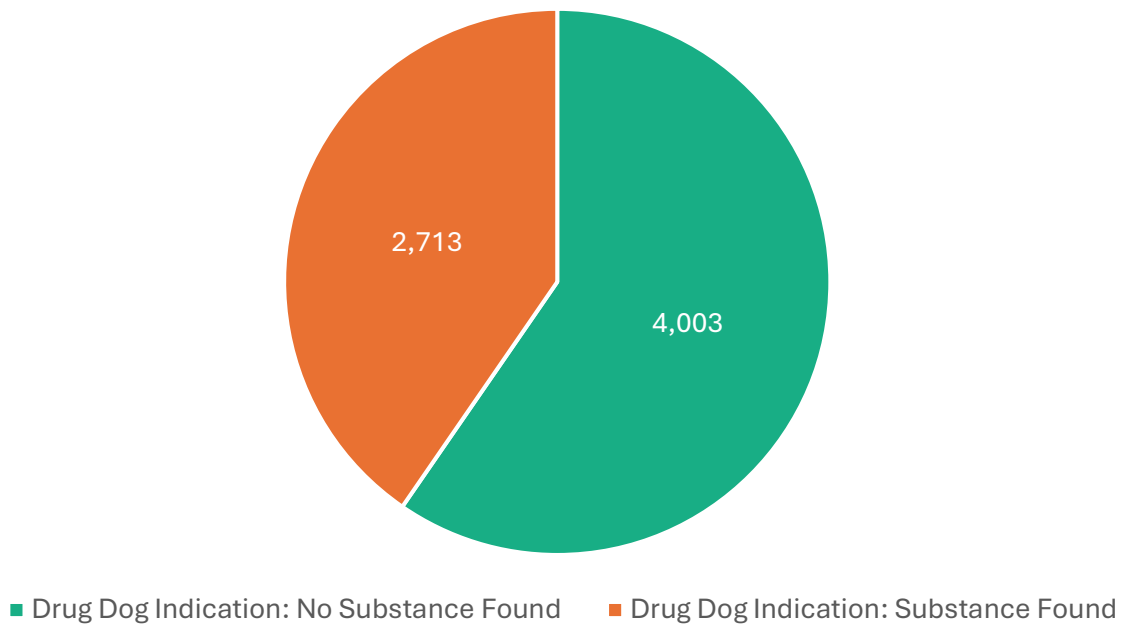
While confirmation on the percentage of positive drug dog indications that resulted in the discovery of an illicit substance varied greatly over the 10-year period of data, the average was only 40% (see Figure 15 below).

This means that 6 in 10 people being strip-searched because of a positive drug dog indication are being falsely identified by the drug dog as carrying illicit substances.

Figure 15: Drug dog indication: substance found (2014 – 2023)

Year	Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication (#)	Drug Dog Indication: Substance Found (#)	Percentage (%)
2014	586	232	39.59%
2015	619	246	39.74%
2016	572	242	42.31%
2017	1,093	386	35.32%
2018	1,522	503	33.05%
2019	1,121	389	34.70%
2020	285	179	62.81%
2021	114	48	42.11%
2022	362	190	52.49%
2023	442	298	67.42%
Total	6,716	2,713	40.40%

Figure 16: Drug dog indication: no substance found vs substance found (2014-2023)



Figures 15 & 16 above also shows that only 2,241 individuals out of 6,700 people searched were charged with a drug related offence, with the majority being minor drug possession. This represents just 33% of the more than 6,700 people who were searched.

Figure 17: Drug dog indication: charged with possession or supply of a prohibited drug (2014-2023)

Year	Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication (#)	Charged with Possession or Supply of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Charged with Possession or Supply of a Prohibited Drug (%)
2014	586	191	32.59%
2015	619	221	35.70%
2016	572	231	40.38%
2017	1,093	356	32.57%
2018	1,522	490	32.19%
2019	1,121	304	27.12%
2020	285	103	36.14%
2021	114	34	29.82%
2022	362	138	38.12%
2023	442	173	39.14%
Total	6,716	2,241	33.37%

The overwhelming majority of people were charged with the more minor charge of possession of a prohibited drug, with less than 4% of people being charged for supply of a prohibited drug (see Figure 17 above). Again, there is a justifiable cause of concern in the ongoing use of this practice by the NSW Police given the limited number of charges that ensues.

Figure 18: Drug dog indication: charged with possession of a prohibited drug (2014-2023)

Year	Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication (#)	Charged with Possession of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Charged with Possession of a Prohibited Drug (%)
2014	586	178	30.38%
2015	619	194	31.34%
2016	572	199	34.79%
2017	1,093	324	29.64%
2018	1,522	449	29.50%
2019	1,121	266	23.73%
2020	285	88	30.88%
2021	114	28	24.56%
2022	362	110	30.39%
2023	442	139	31.45%
Total	6,716	1,975	29.41%

Figure 19: Drug dog indication: charged with supply of a prohibited drug (2014-2023)

Year	Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication (#)	Drug Dog Indication: Charged with Supply of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Percentage (%)
2014	586	13	2.22%
2015	619	27	4.36%
2016	572	32	5.59%
2017	1,093	32	2.93%
2018	1,522	41	2.69%
2019	1,121	38	3.39%
2020	285	15	5.26%
2021	114	6	5.26%
2022	362	28	7.73%
2023	442	34	7.69%
Total	6,716	266	3.96%

Figures 18 & 19 above show that the overwhelming majority of people were charged with possession of a prohibited drug with less than 4% of people being charged for supply of a prohibited drug.

Figure 20: Drug dog indication: charged with possession vs charged with supply of a prohibited drug (2014-2023)

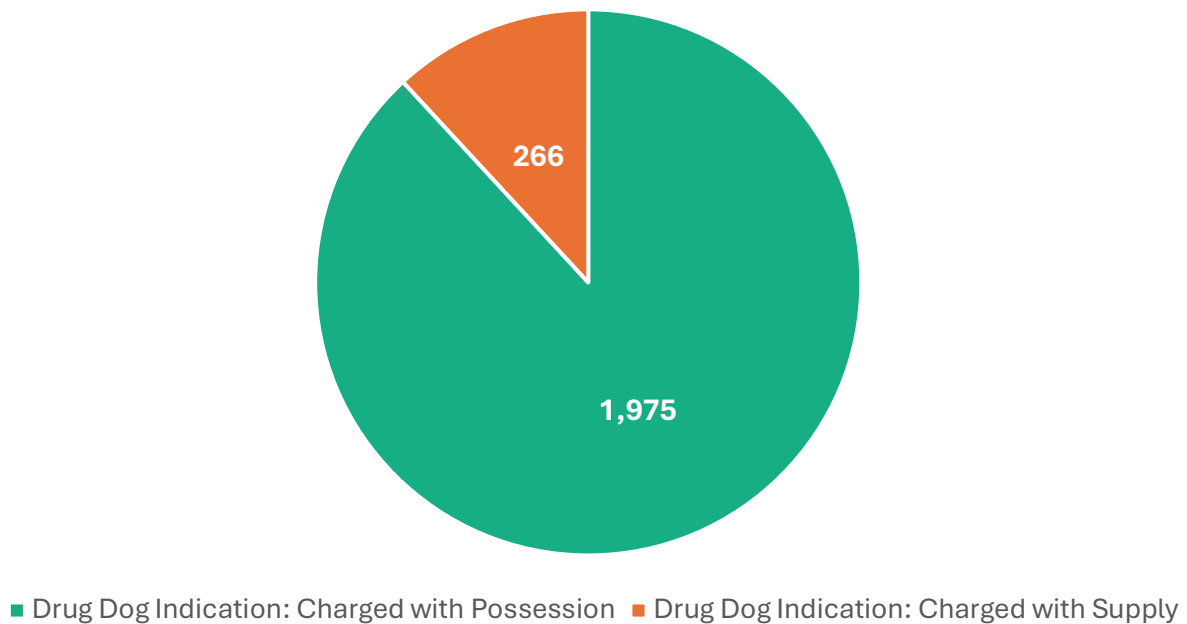
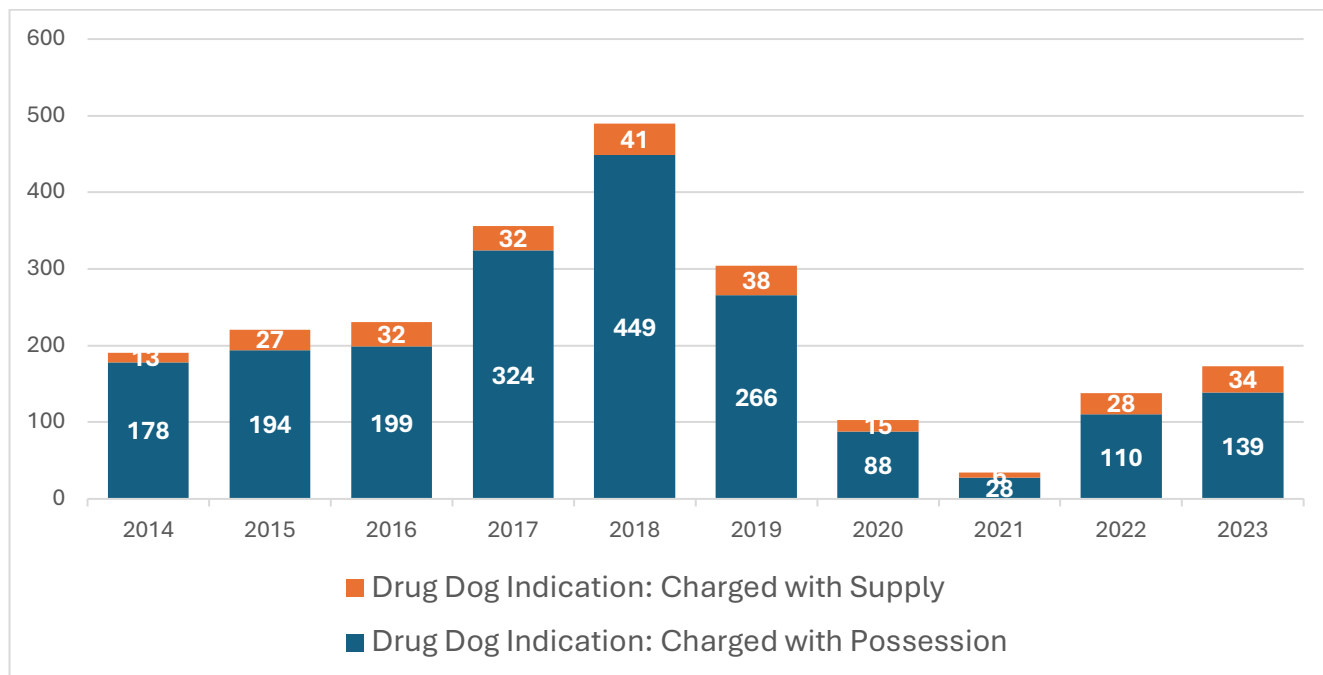


Figure 21: Drug dog indication: charged with possession vs charged with supply of a prohibited drug by year (2014-2023)



The data in Figures 22 -25 below demonstrates that not all charges relating to drug possession result in conviction. Over a ten-year period, less than 10% of people strip searched were then convicted of drug possession.

Figure 22: Drug dog indication: no conviction vs conviction of possession or supply of a prohibited drug (2014-2023)

Drug Dog Indication: No Conviction vs Conviction of Possession or Supply of a Prohibited Drug

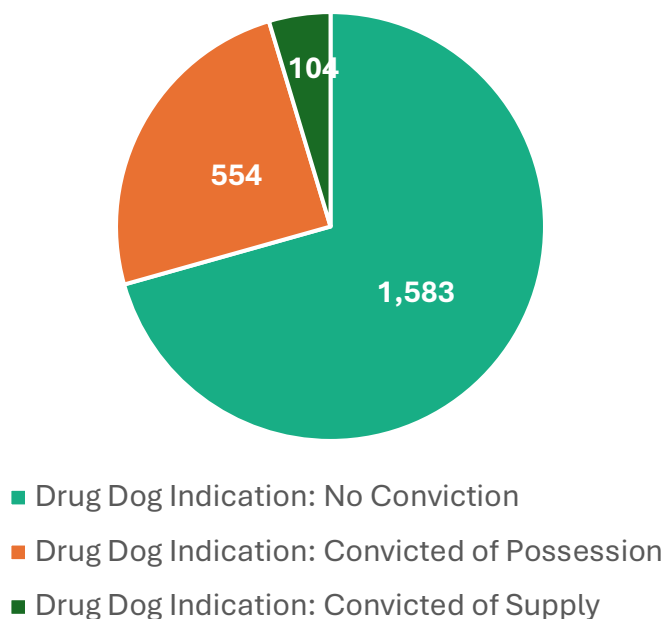


Figure 23: Drug dog indication: convicted of possession or supply of a prohibited drug (2014-2023)

Year	Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication (#)	Conviction (#)	Conviction (%)
2014	586	59	10.07%
2015	619	72	11.63%
2016	572	81	14.16%
2017	1,093	111	10.16%
2018	1,522	130	8.54%
2019	1,121	97	8.65%
2020	285	26	9.12%
2021	114	16	14.04%
2022	362	39	10.77%
2023	442	27	6.11%
Total	6,716	658	9.80%

Figure 24: Drug dog indication: convicted of possession of a prohibited drug (2014-2023)

Year	Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication (#)	Drug Dog Indication: Convicted of Possession of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Percentage (%)
2014	586	52	8.87%
2015	619	67	10.82%
2016	572	71	12.41%
2017	1,093	96	8.78%
2018	1,522	109	7.16%
2019	1,121	77	6.87%
2020	285	20	7.02%
2021	114	11	9.65%
2022	362	29	8.01%
2023	442	22	4.98%
Total	6,716	554	8.25%

Figure 25: Drug dog indication: convicted of supply of a prohibited drug (2014-2023)

Year	Strip Searches from Drug Dog Indication (#)	Drug Dog Indication: Convicted of Supply of a Prohibited Drug (#)	Percentage (%)
2014	586	7	1.19%
2015	619	5	0.81%
2016	572	10	1.75%
2017	1,093	15	1.37%
2018	1,522	21	1.38%
2019	1,121	20	1.78%
2020	285	6	2.11%
2021	114	5	4.39%
2022	362	10	2.76%
2023	442	5	1.13%
Total	6,716	104	1.55%

Footnotes & References

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