

Views of drug residue testing among a sample of people who regularly inject illicit drugs, 2026

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Introduction

Drug residue testing involves chemical analysis of used injecting equipment, including from sharps disposal bins, to identify substances in circulation. Previous studies (1,2) have demonstrated that analysis of used syringes can provide timely, objective information about drugs being injected, complementing existing drug monitoring and early warning systems by helping identify emerging, unexpected or potentially harmful substances.

However, little is known about how people who inject drugs perceive this practice or what they would like to see included in such a program.

Aim

To examine awareness of and support for drug residue testing among people who regularly inject illicit drugs in Australia and identify concerns and program features that may shape its acceptability.

Methods

Interviews were conducted with 902 people who regularly inject illicit drugs, recruited from capital cities across Australia as part of the 2026 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS). Eligibility criteria comprised being aged ≥ 18 years, having lived in an Australian capital city for at least 10 of the 12 months preceding interview, and having injected illicit drugs $\geq$ six days in the previous six months.

Questions on drug residue testing were included as a brief component of the broader IDRS survey. Participants may therefore not have had sufficient opportunity to fully consider this complex topic before responding. Findings should therefore be interpreted as preliminary insights into community perspectives which may evolve with further information, discussion, and consultation. Indeed, missing responses ranged from $<1\%$ – 22% ($n=7$ – 202), suggesting participant burden and/or reluctance to answer some questions.

Discussion

Despite low prior awareness (19%), drug residue testing was broadly supported among this sample of people who regularly inject drugs (64%). However, even participants who were supportive reported being 'very concerned' about a range of issues, and 79% of the overall sample placed considerable importance on being able to opt out.

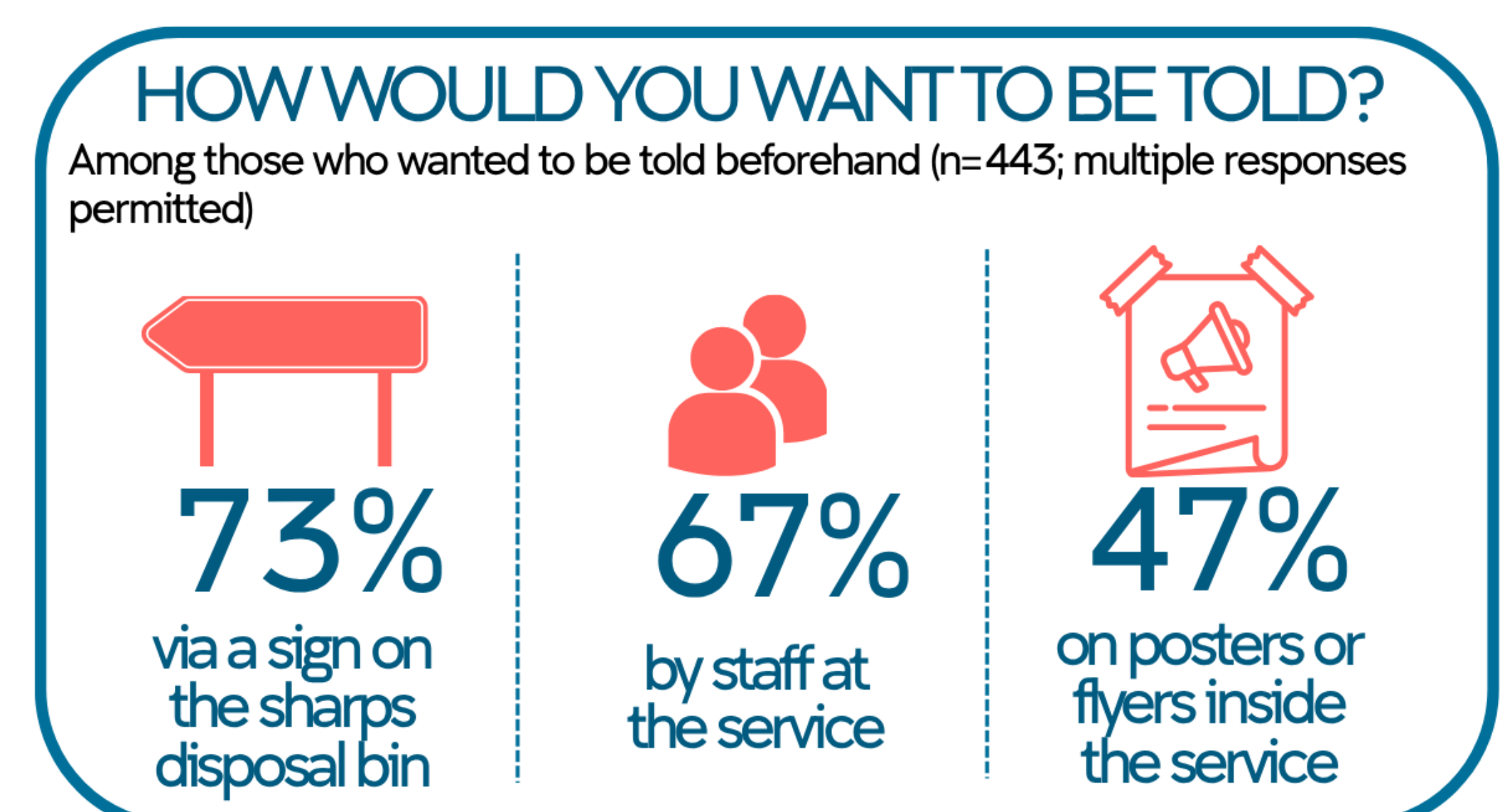
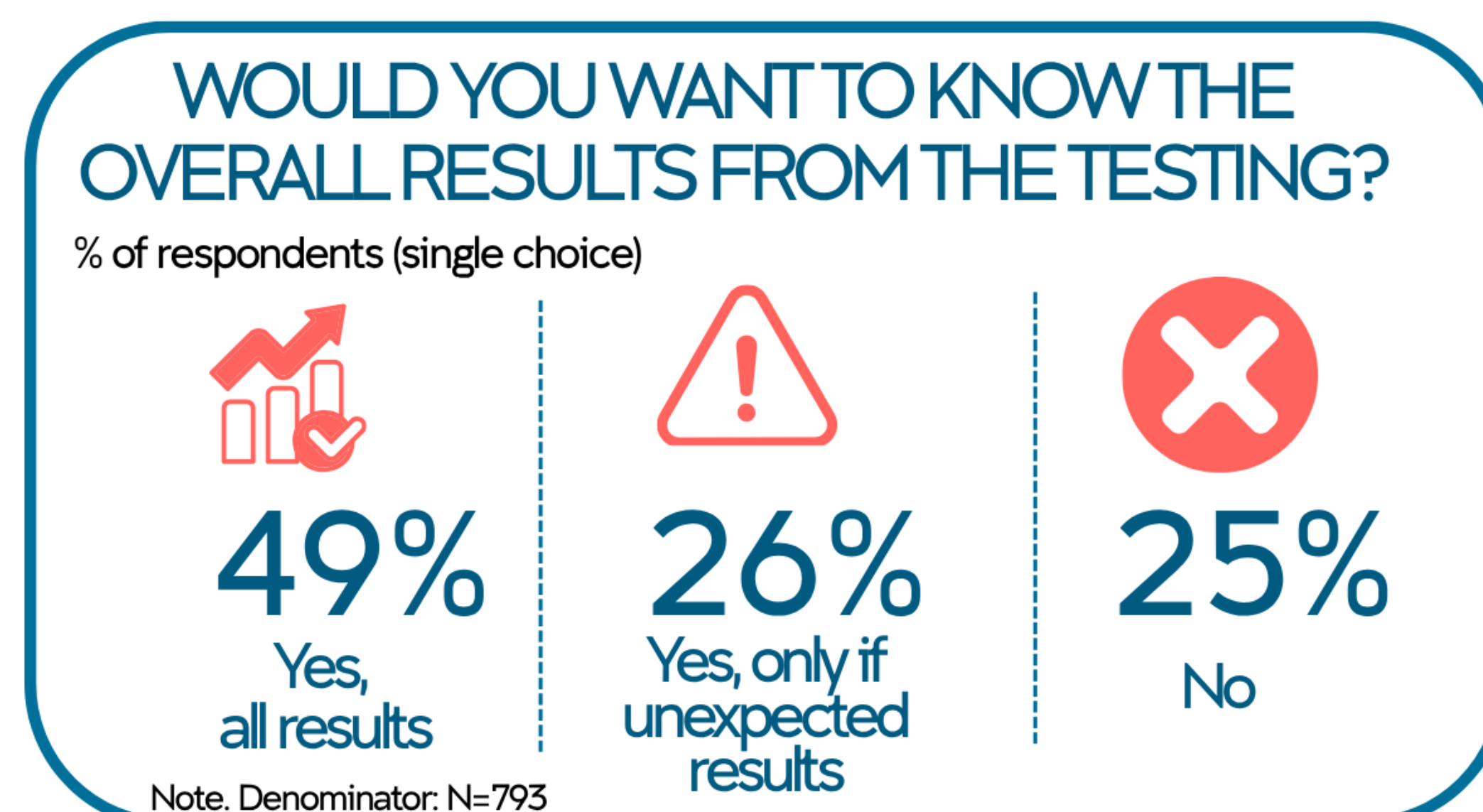
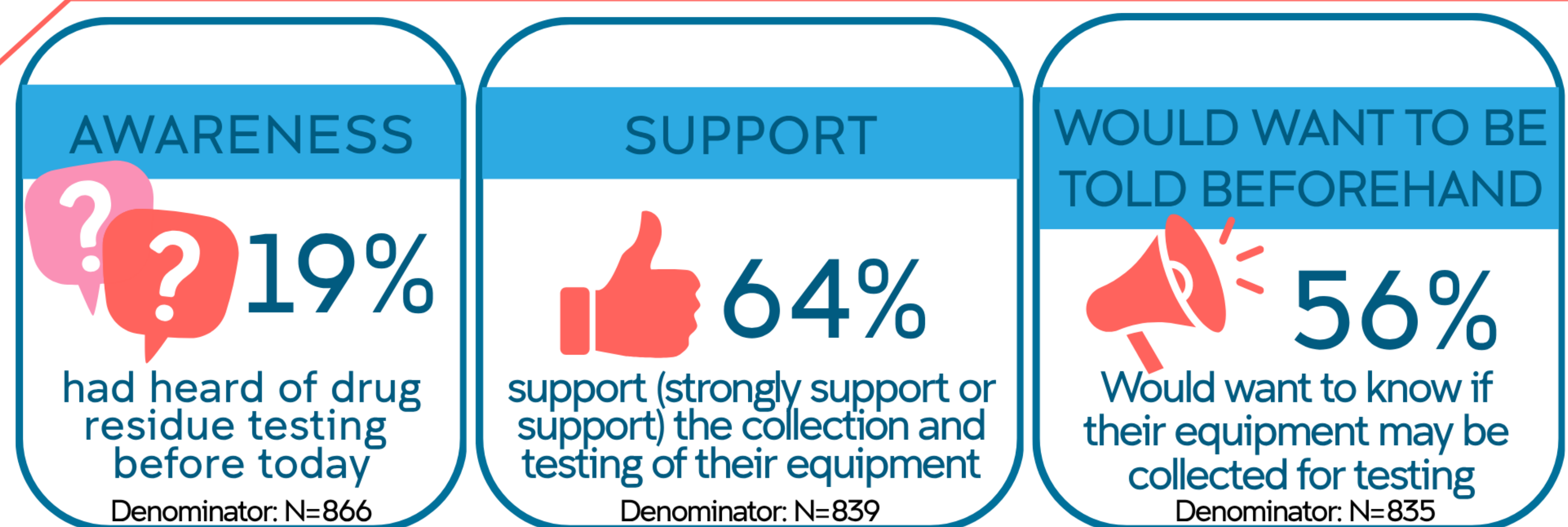
Findings suggest that acceptability is likely to depend on how testing programs are implemented, particularly around transparency, choice and communication. Consultation with people who inject drugs, particularly when programs are being developed or introduced, may help identify and address commonly held concerns. Ensuring that findings are communicated back to the community may help support acceptable and useful drug residue testing programs.

References

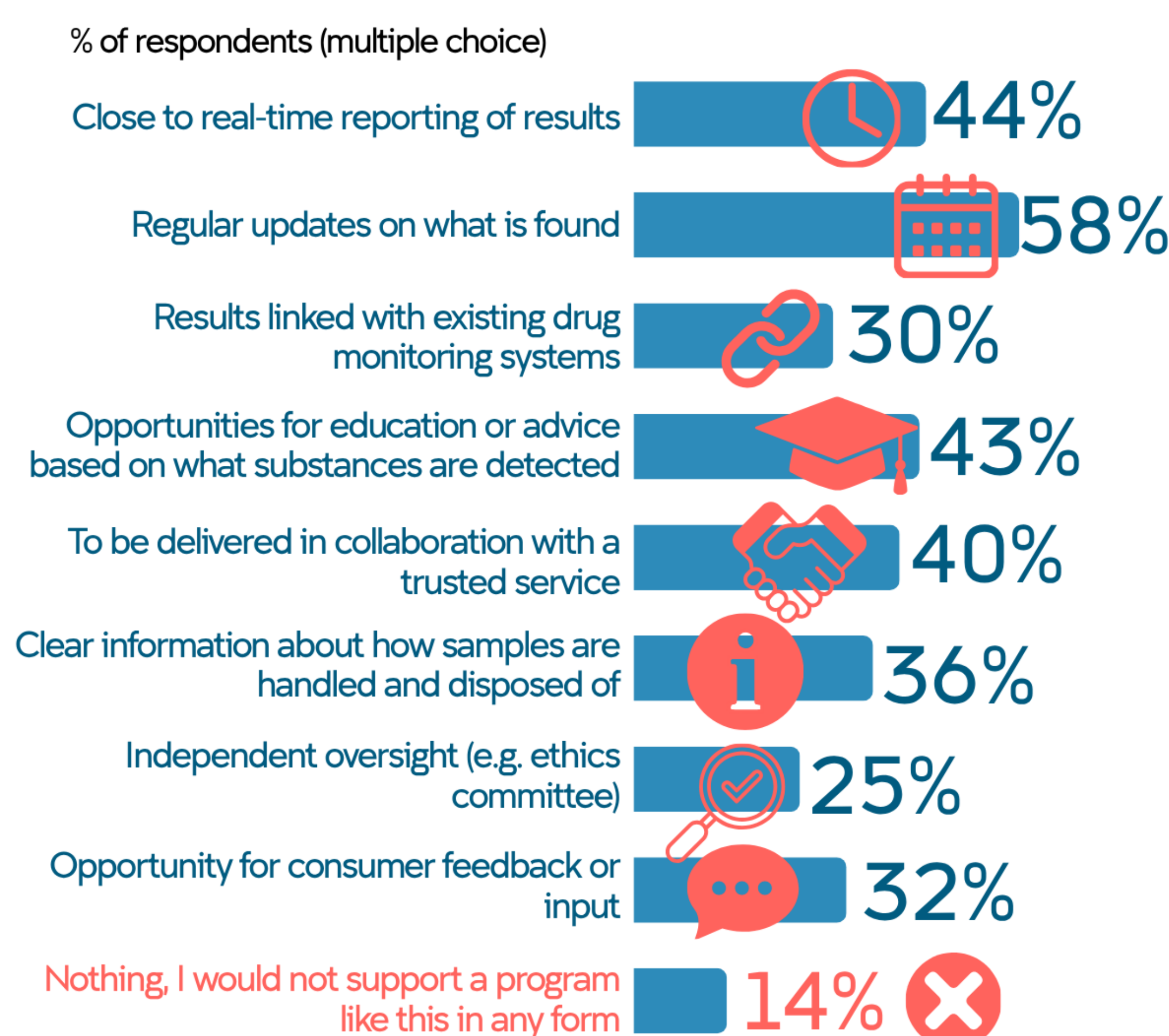
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Results

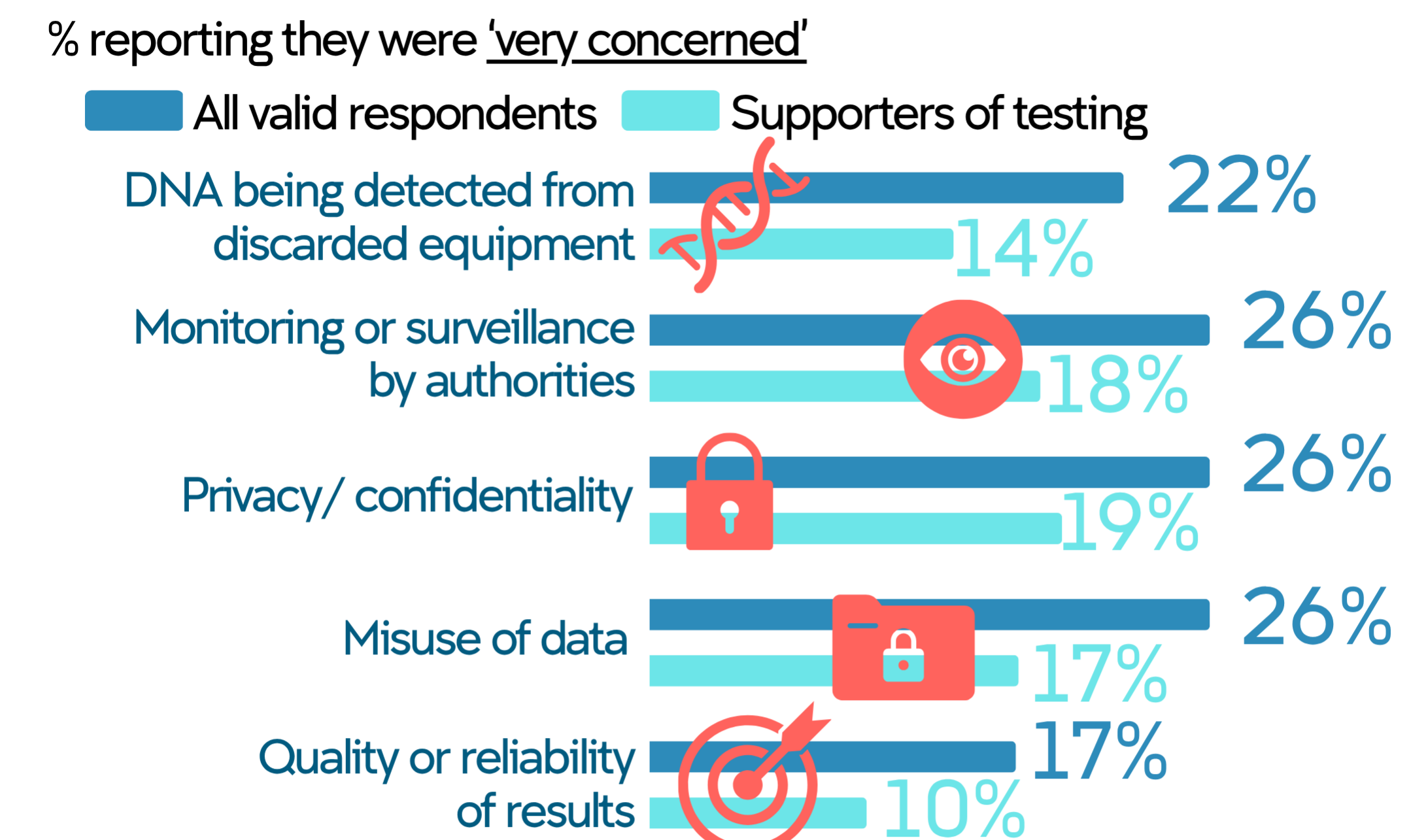
'We're interested in your views on drug residue testing. This sometimes involves chemically analysing used injecting equipment to look for traces of drugs that were present. The information can help track changes in drug markets and be used to issue alerts about unexpected or potentially dangerous substances. Drug residue testing has been used in Europe for many years and is being explored in other places, including Australia. In the questions below, we mostly focus on models where discarded equipment is collected anonymously from sharps disposal bins'



WHAT WOULD YOU IDEALLY WANT FROM A PROGRAM LIKE THIS?

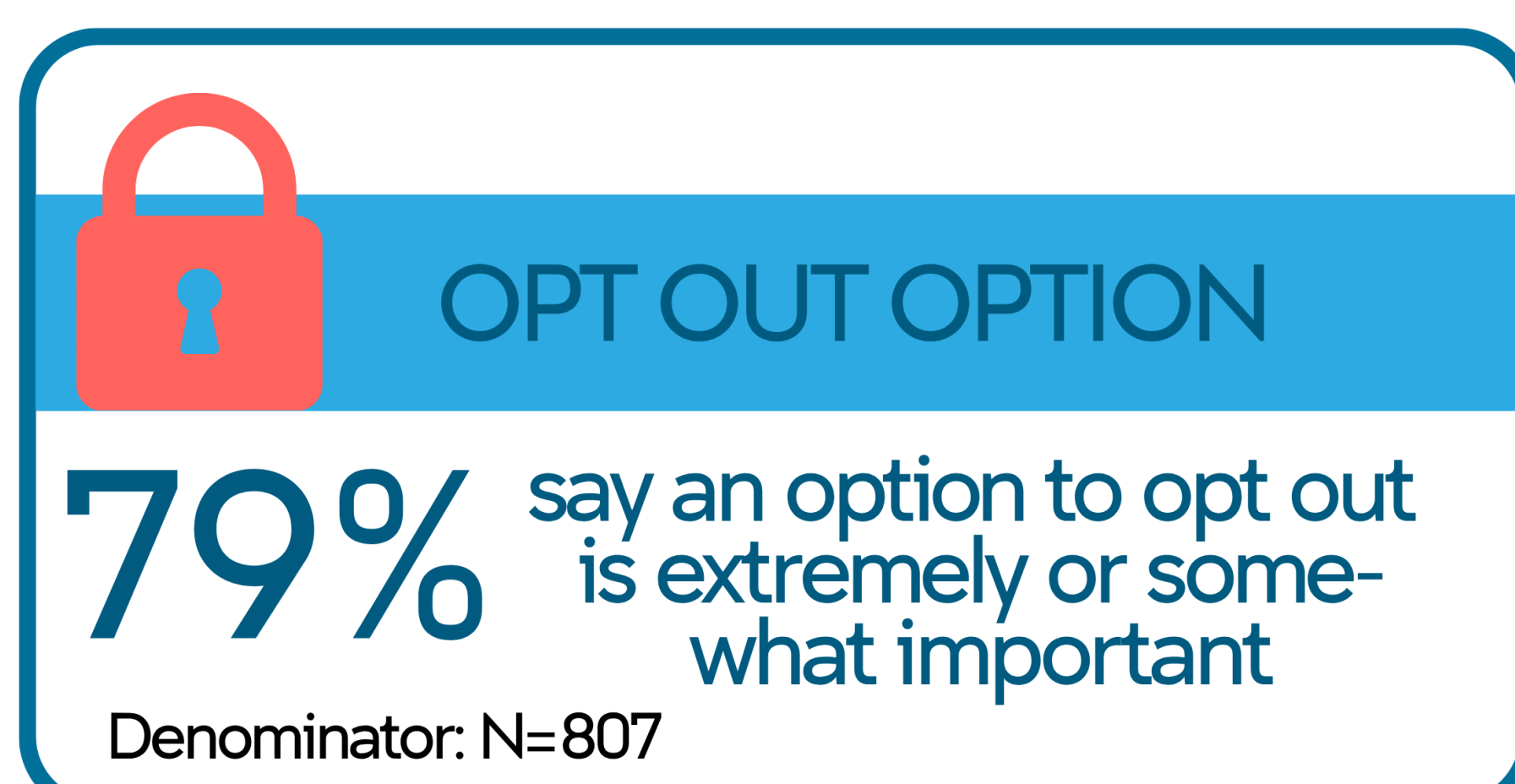
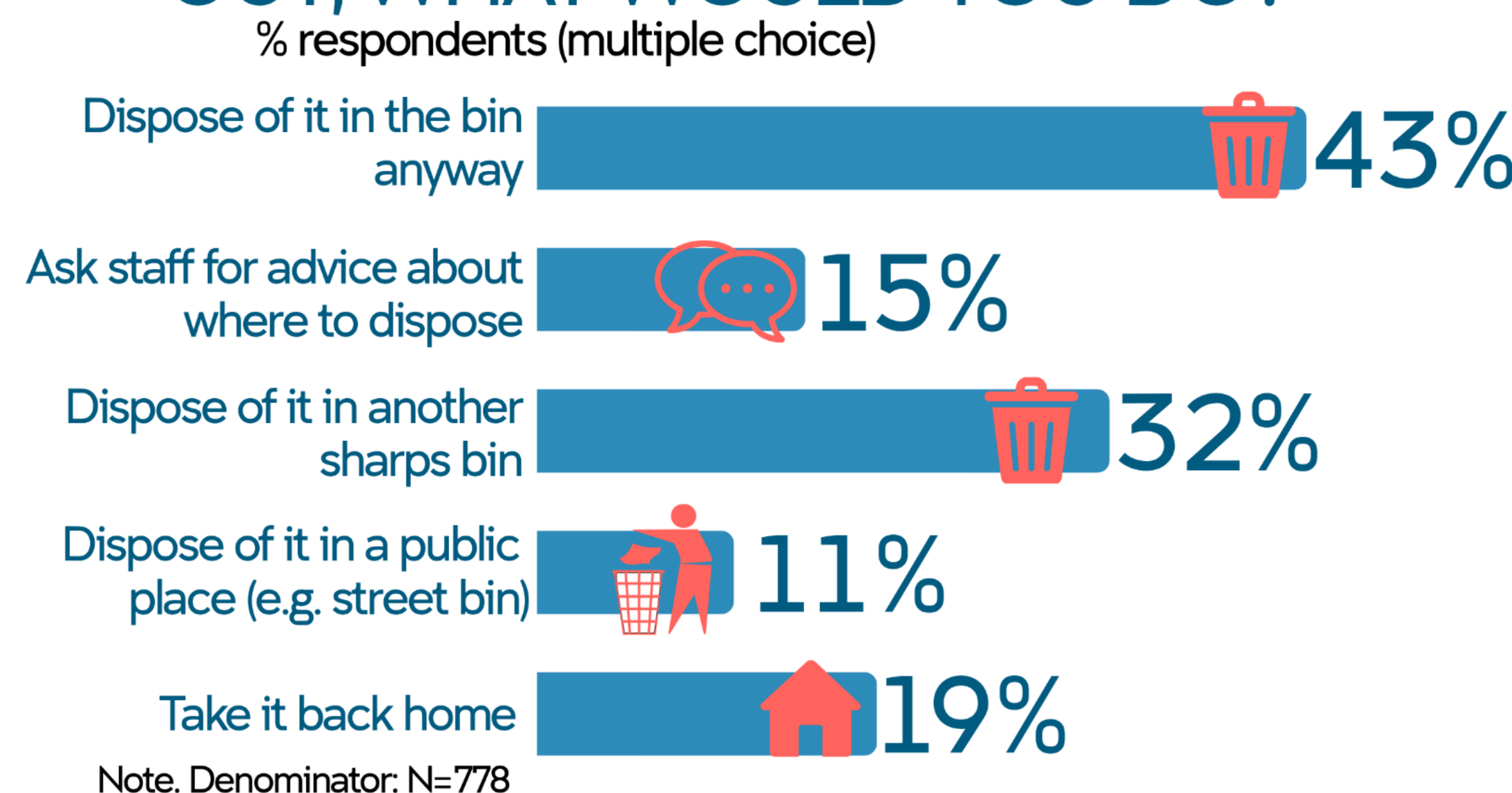


CONCERNS ABOUT TESTING



Note. Participants rated each concern as: not at all, a little, moderately, or very concerned. "Supporters" were those who supported or strongly supported the collection and testing of their discarded equipment. Valid $n=805$ – 832 across concern items overall and $n=516$ – 520 among supporters.

IF NO CLEAR WAY TO OPT OUT, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?



Acknowledgement & information

The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS), falling within the Drug Trends program of work, was supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing under the Drug and Alcohol Program. We would like to thank all the participants who were interviewed for the IDRS in the present and in previous years. For more information, please email: j.uporova@unsw.edu.au