

# Vancouver Island

## Drug Checking Project

### Preliminary Results for November 2021

The Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project delivers drug checking services in Victoria, BC, with pop-up drug checking services in Port Alberni, Courtenay/Comox, and Campbell River during November. Our service has been operating in partnership with SOLID Outreach, AVI Health and Community Services, Lantern Services, Dr. Chris Gill and the team at Vancouver Island University, and the Island Health Authority. This free and confidential service provides information on composition of substances and harm reduction information.

# 259

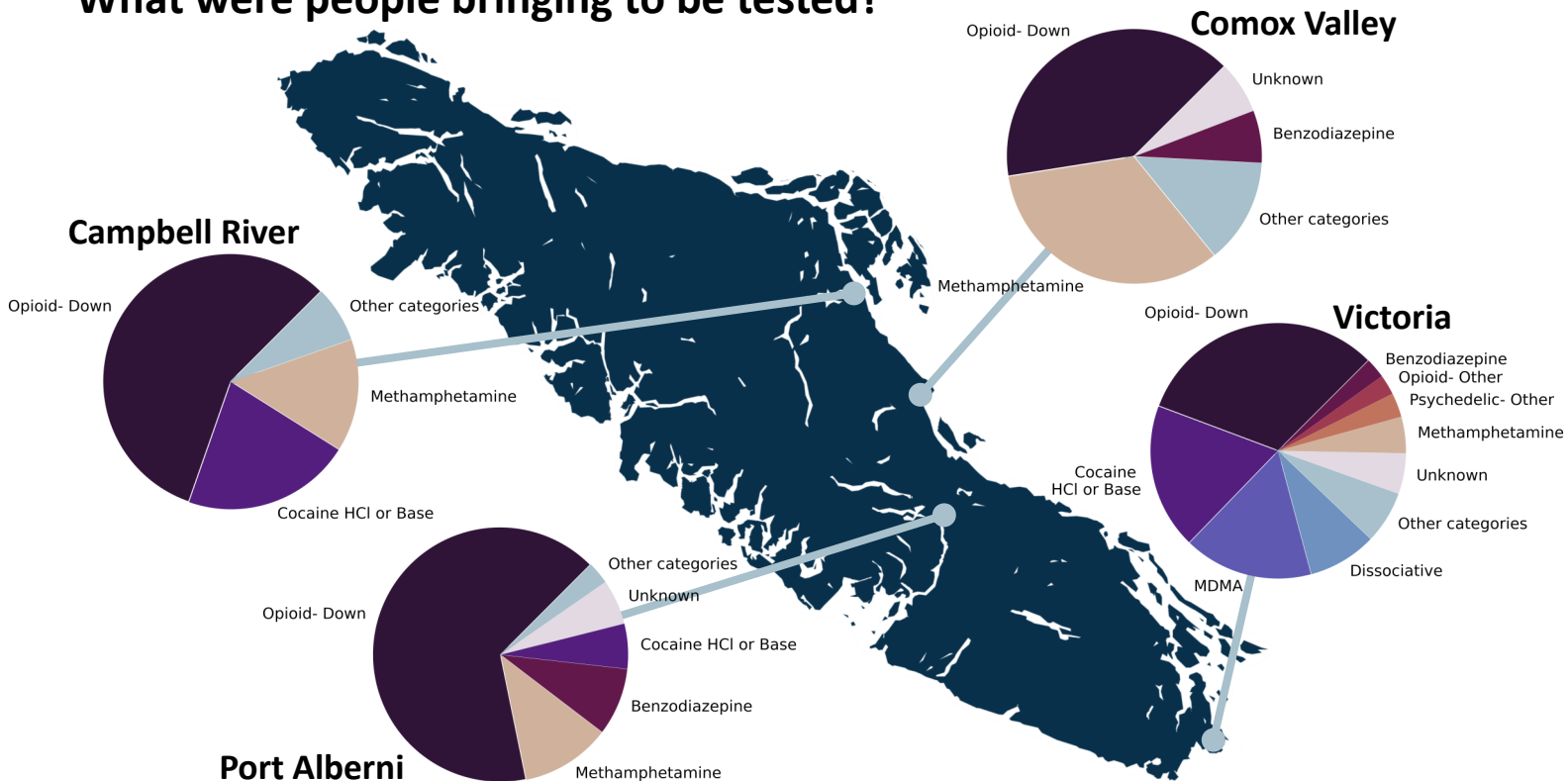
Samples Tested  
1 - 30 November  
2021

#### Highlighted findings:

- Carfentanil was found in three samples, all expected opioid-down
- 96% of expected opioid-down samples contained fentanyl
- Median fentanyl concentration found was 8.4%, with a maximum of 35.2%
- Benzodiazepines and/or etizolam found in 77.8% of expected opioid-down samples
- The maximum concentration of etizolam found was >25%, in an expected opioid-down sample
- Xylazine was detected in 13 opioid-down samples, with a maximum concentration of 12.5%

[Read our blog](#) for further interpretations of our November data.

### What were people bringing to be tested?



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## What were people bringing to be tested?

Service users bring us a wide variety of substances that can be grouped into different drug classes. The table below aggregates the number of samples we tested by their “expected” substance (i.e. the drug category reported by the service user) and by the location where sample was collected. These data are also visually represented in the pie charts on the front page of this document.

Expected substance	Campbell River	Comox Valley	Port Alberni	Victoria
Opioid Down (fentanyl and/or heroin)	8	6	23	62
Psychedelic (MDMA, MDA, LSD, 2C-B)				38
Cocaine (HCl or Base)	3		2	36
Dissociative (ketamine)				17
Methamphetamine	2	5	4	9
Benzodiazepine (alprazolam, diazepam, etizolam)		1	3	5
Other Opioid (Dilaudid, oxycodone)			1	5
Depressants (GHB)				4
Other (cannabinoids, “research chemicals”)		2		9
Unknown/Missing	1	1	2	10
Total samples tested at each location*	14	15	35	195

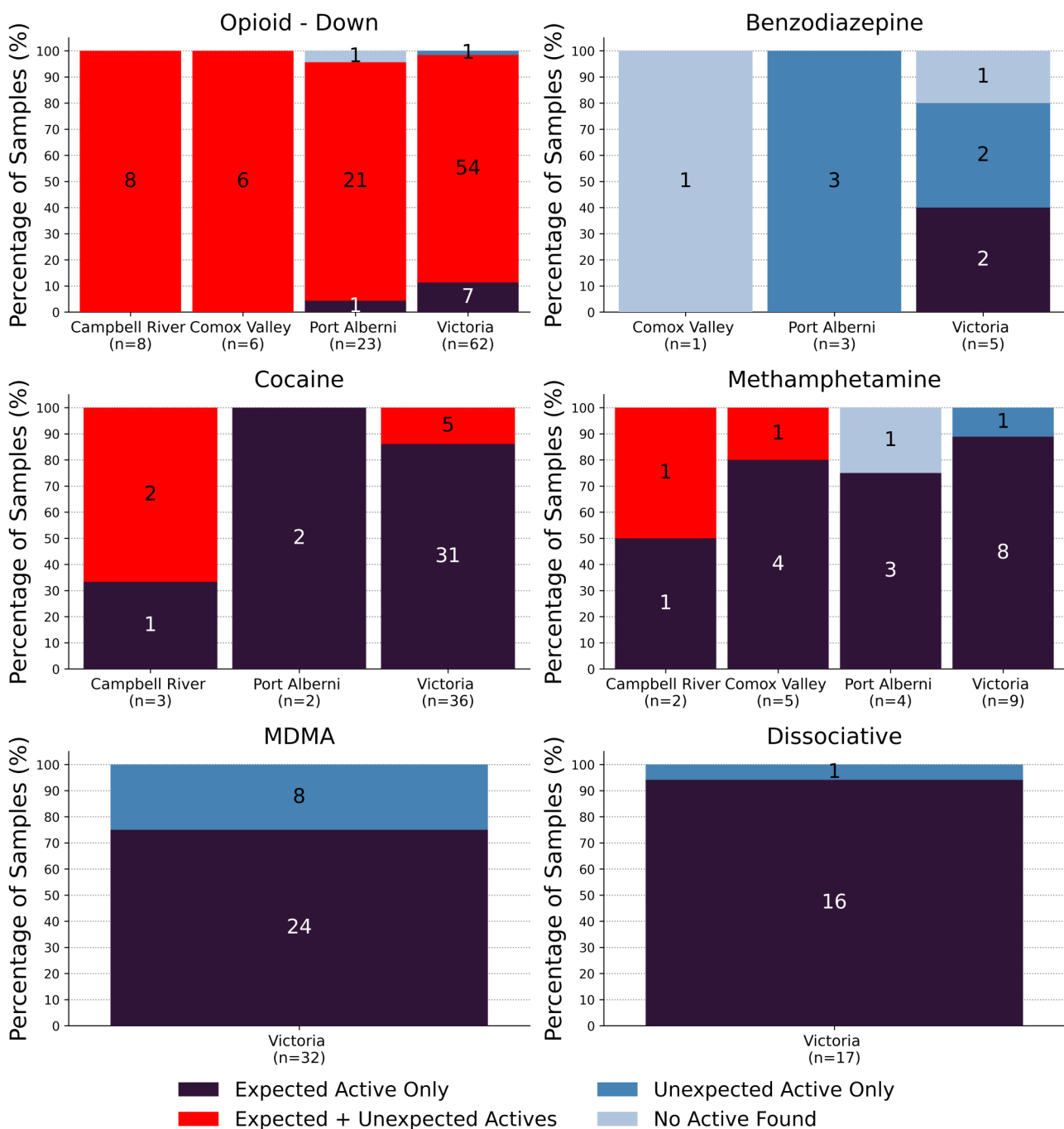
*\* In November, we ran pop-up drug checking services in Port Alberni, the Comox Valley, and Campbell River. The samples presented above, for those locations, were collected during a single day of drug checking and thus only provide a limited snapshot of the markets in each community.*

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## What did we find?

We tested each sample to determine what active ingredients, adulterants, and cutting agents were present. The majority of samples contained the expected active drug. However, we also detected a number of notable components that may cause unexpected effects. The figures below illustrate the percentages and numbers of samples tested in each drug category at each location, color coded by their composition. **Dark Purple** regions group samples that were simply as expected with no other notable compounds detected, **Red** shows samples that contained the expected drug *and* were contaminated with an unexpected active, **Dark Blue** groups samples that only contained an unexpected active (the expected drug was not found), and **Light Blue** displays samples where no active compounds were detected.



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## What did we find?

Expanding on the figures shown on the previous page, for each drug category and location we list the number of samples that contained the expected active and/or other notable components.

Opioid Down	Campbell River	Comox Valley	Port Alberni	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>
Fentanyl			1	7
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>54</b>
Fentanyl*	8	6	21	52
Heroin*				3
Acetylcodeine				3
Acetylfentanyl	4	1	3	1
Acetylmorphine				3
Alprazolam				3
Amphetamine			1	
Benzocaine		1		
Benzodiazepine (undifferentiated) <sup>2</sup>	7		9	16
Carfentanil			1	2
Cocaine Base			1	
Etizolam	7	6	9	30
Fluorofentanyl	4	1		16
Flualprazolam	4	5		5
Flubromazolam				1
Hydromorphone				2
Isotonitazene			6	2
Lidocaine	4		9	
Morphine				1
Xylazine	1	4		7
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>				<b>1</b>
Hydromorphone				1
Morphine				1

Opioid Other	Port Alberni	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>		<b>4</b>
Hydromorphone		1
Morphine		1
Oxycodone		3
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Acetaminophen	1	1

Psychedelics	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>29</b>
DMT	1
LSD	4
MDA	1
MDMA	23
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	<b>9</b>
MDA	7
MDMA	2

Dissociatives	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>16</b>
3-MeO-PCP	1
DMXE	1
Ketamine	14
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	<b>1</b>
Acetaminophen	1
N-ethylpentylone	1

Data are preliminary. There were missing data for some

samples. Instruments may not be able to detect all ingredients and certainty of interpretations may vary. Multiple substances may be present in one sample and substances may be present in trace concentrations. as unexpected components of note, such as those with the potential for unexpected effects or that impact the effectiveness of naloxone. \*Expected active component. <sup>2</sup>Benzodiazepine (undifferentiated) results are based on a positive benzo strip test and are unconfirmed by paper spray.

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Methamphetamine	Campbell River	Comox Valley	Port Alberni	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>
Methamphetamine	1	4	3	8
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		
Methamphetamine*	1	1		
Etizolam		1		
Fentanyl	1	1		
Xyazine		1		
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>				<b>1</b>
Diphenhydramine				1

Depressants	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>4</b>
GHB	4

Other	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>3</b>
3-FPM	1
Methylphenidate	1
Oxandrolone	1
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	<b>2</b>
Amphetamine	1
Cannabidiol	1

Cocaine (HCL or Base)	Campbell River	Port Alberni	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>31</b>
Cocaine Base		1	1
Cocaine HCl	1	1	30
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>5</b>
Cocaine Base*	1		2
Cocaine HCl*	1		3
Levamisole	1		2
Phenacetin	1		4

Unknown/Missing	Comox Valley	Port Alberni	Victoria
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>
Acetylfentanyl			1
Benzodiazepine (undifferentiated) <sup>2</sup>		1	2
Cocaine Base			1
Cocaine HCl	1		1
Etizolam	1		1
Fentanyl	1	2	3
Isotonitazene		1	
Levamisole			1
MDA			1
Methamphetamine			1
THC			1

Benzodiazepines	Port Alberni	Victoria
<b>Expected Active Only</b>		<b>2</b>
Benzodiazepine (undifferentiated) <sup>2</sup>		1
Clonazepam		1
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
Etizolam	3	2
Fentanyl		1

Data are preliminary. There were missing data for some samples. Instruments may not be able to detect all ingredients and certainty of interpretations may vary. Multiple substances may be present in one sample and substances may be present in trace concentrations. \*Expected active component. <sup>1</sup>May be due to limitations of technology to detect certain substances. <sup>2</sup>Benzodiazepine (undifferentiated) results are based on a positive benzo strip test and are unconfirmed by paper spray.

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## Quantification

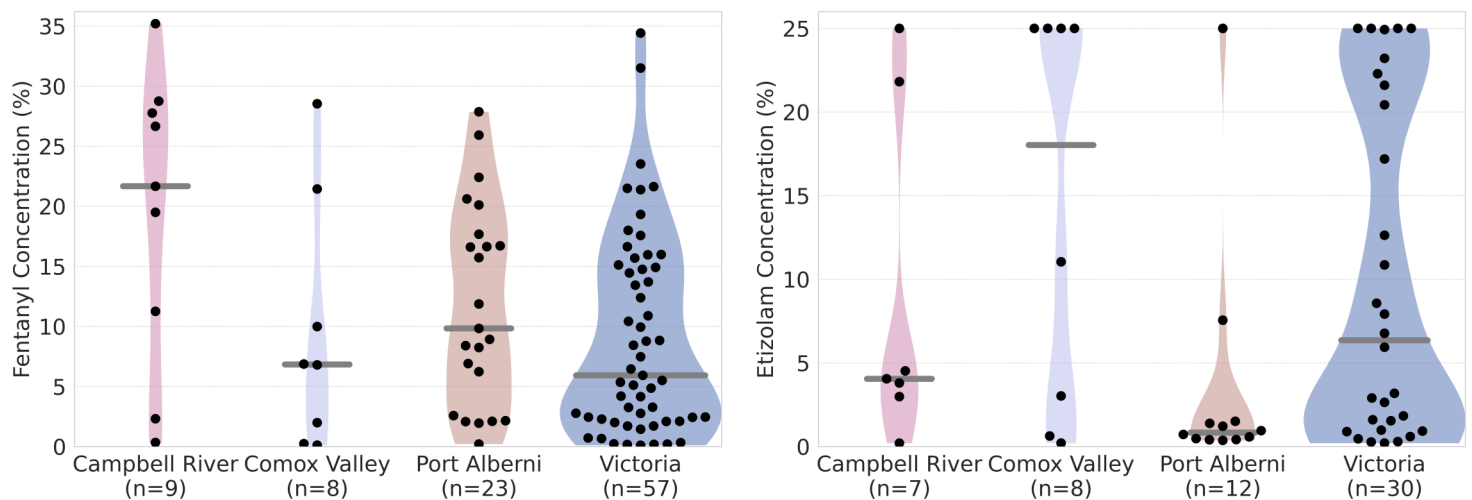
Using paper spray mass spectrometry (PS-MS) data, we were able to quantify low level actives. These aggregate values are inclusive to all expected drug categories in which the active drugs are found, and to all locations across Vancouver Island where we collected samples. Weight percentage is reported below.

Substance	# quant	median	min	max
Fentanyl	97	8.4%	0.1%	35.2%
Etizolam	57	3.2%	0.2%	> 25%*
Fluorofentanyl	21	5.9%	0.2%	18.4%
Flualprazolam	13	1.1%	0.3%	5.4%
Xylazine	13	3.3%	0.2%	12.5%
Isotonitazene	9	1.2%	0.2%	6.5%
Carfentanil	3	0.5%	0.2%	0.5%
Heroin	3	18.5%	10.4%	> 80%*

\*There is a maximum concentration limit for each compound of interest that the PS-MS can report. If a sample contains a higher percentage of a compound than the PS-MS's limits, then only the limit will be reported. For example, the upper limit of reporting for etizolam on the PS-MS is 25% - any sample containing more than 25% etizolam will be flagged as ">25%".

## Distribution of Concentrations by Location

The concentrations of fentanyl and etizolam for every sample quantified, grouped by service location, are illustrated below to highlight the regional variability in the unregulated drug market. **Black Dots** are individual samples, **Grey Lines** mark the median concentration of the fentanyl/etizolam positive samples checked at each location, and the **width** of the colored regions is proportional to the number of samples in a concentration range.



Some guiding examples from the figure: • the median concentration of fentanyl in samples collected in Campbell River was higher than in the other three locations • the distribution of fentanyl concentrations for samples tested in Port Alberni was fairly uniform below 20% • more high concentration etizolam samples were tested in the Comox Valley than in Campbell River or Port Alberni • a majority of the etizolam positive samples collected in Port Alberni contained less than 3% etizolam by weight.

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The Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project is based out of the University of Victoria and operates community-wide drug checking services within Victoria, BC. We are continuing to offer drug checking services in response to the dual public health emergencies, and exploring new ways to better reach those who may benefit from this service. At all locations visited in November, we were humbled by the important services provided by staff and experiential workers on the ground in response to the challenges of the ongoing overdose and housing crises. We continue to be inspired by the critical work each partner organization does to better serve the people who use drugs, and those who support them. We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate and look forward to sustaining the relationships we have built. We'd like to send a very warm thank you to Port Alberni Shelter Society, AVI Health and Community Services, Vancouver Island Mental Health Society, Comox Bay Care Society's Care-A-Van, and Comox Valley Transition Society's Connect drop-in. We'd also like to thank members of the Community Action Teams who have helped facilitate our pop-up trips.

See the blog portion of our website to view our more detailed interpretations of our reports.

*Our project respectfully acknowledges that we work as visitors on the traditional territory of the Lkwungen (Songhees), Wyomilth (Esquimalt), and WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) peoples of the Coast Salish Nation. We also acknowledge the inextricable links between research, colonization and racism against Indigenous peoples, which continue to this day. Ending the violence faced by people who use substances and the overdose crisis cannot be achieved without facing the legacy through which we have come to be in this territory.*

For more information please visit: [substance.uvic.ca](https://substance.uvic.ca)

We gratefully acknowledge our partners and funders on this project

## Our Partners



## Our Funders

