

Vancouver Island

Drug Checking Project

Event Drug Checking - 2022

In Canada, drug checking has its roots in rave and festival cultures where drug checking has been provided through various ways since the 1990s. In BC, ANKORS Harm Reduction staff and volunteers have pioneered festival harm reduction and drug checking at the Shambhala Music Festival with a robust drug checking program that spans nearly two decades. Event promoters are increasingly seeing value in providing harm reduction services, including community drug checking, as such services facilitate safer drug use practices at events, operate as visible hubs to build community and decrease stigma, inform people and their peers about the composition of their substances, help monitor the unregulated drug supply, and aide in health interventions.

Amidst the ongoing overdose crisis in British Columbia and the harms of the unregulated drug supply, the Province of BC enacted enabling legislation to authorize both drug checking collection and testing sites under the authority of Health Canada's Urgent Public Health Needs Sites (UPHNS) regulation. The UPHNS process allows provinces to facilitate the establishment of overdose prevention and drug checking services without the cumbersome process of Section 56(1) exemptions. The UPHNS process has allowed for quick regulatory exemptions to provide drug checking services both in and outside of festival settings.

This past summer, the Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project, in collaboration with Island Health, AVI Health and Community Services, and WILD Collaborative Harm Reduction, have been able to provide critical drug checking services at various events and festivals on Vancouver Island. This report highlights findings from event-based drug checking throughout the summer of 2022.

Service Provision by Event

The table below highlights each event and aggregates the events total number of service users and samples tested at each event. These data are broken down by the expected substance class on page 6 of this document.

Event Name	Event Date(s)	Event Location	Service Users	Samples Checked
Weekend at Lampress	April 23, 2022	Lake Cowichan, BC	14	21
Otherworld	June 16 - 19, 2022	Lake Cowichan, BC	45	65
Phillips Backyard - Implosion Explosion	August 13 - 14, 2022	Victoria, BC	9	9
Plants 'N Animals	August 19, 2022	Lake Cowichan, BC	2	2
Cumberland Wild	August 19 - 20, 2022	Cumberland, BC	11	18
Summer Social	August 27, 2022	Lake Cowichan, BC	11	19
Rifflandia	September 15 - 18, 2022	Victoria, BC	43	56
Total			135	190

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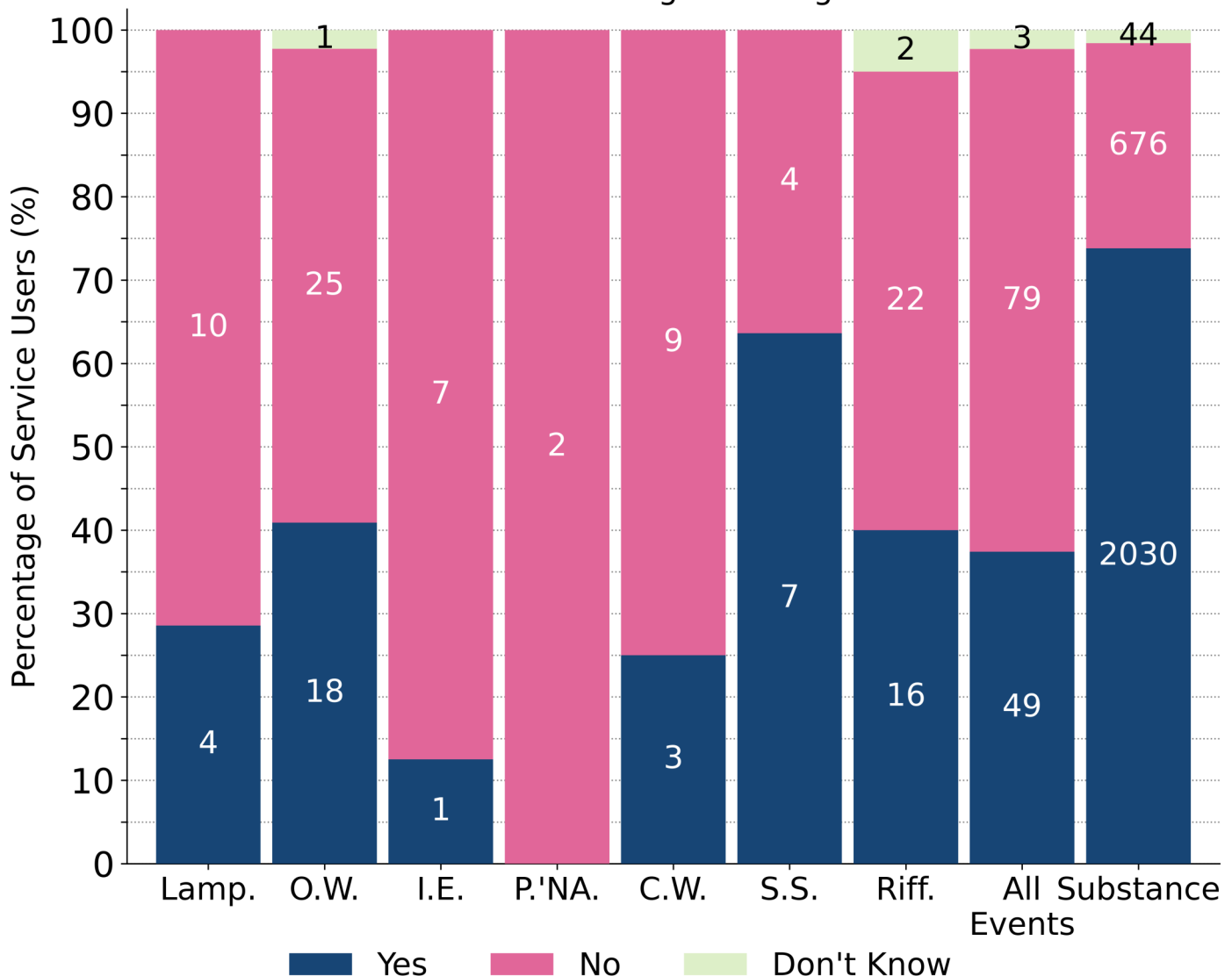
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Does event based drug checking reach new service users?

As part of our intake survey, we collect information on whether or not a service user has accessed *any* drug checking service before (whether that is our service or any other drug checking service). Here, we show the percentages and numbers of service users at each event who had (**Dark Blue bars**), and had not (**Magenta bars**), previously accessed a drug checking service. For reference, we have also included the data from service users who visited our storefront in Victoria ("Substance") in 2022. We can see that for most events, a majority of the service users *had not* accessed a drug checking service before, and that across all events, 60% (79/131) of service users who responded to the intake survey were new to drug checking. Compared to the data collected at our storefront in 2022, only 25% (676/2750) of those service users were new to drug checking. These data suggest that offering drug checking at events is a viable method to expand the reach and accessibility of drug checking, especially to new service users. To note, not every service user responded to our intake survey, and some people checked multiple samples over the duration of the event, so the totals shown here may not add to the total number of service users reached at each event.

Have You Accessed A Drug Checking Service Before?

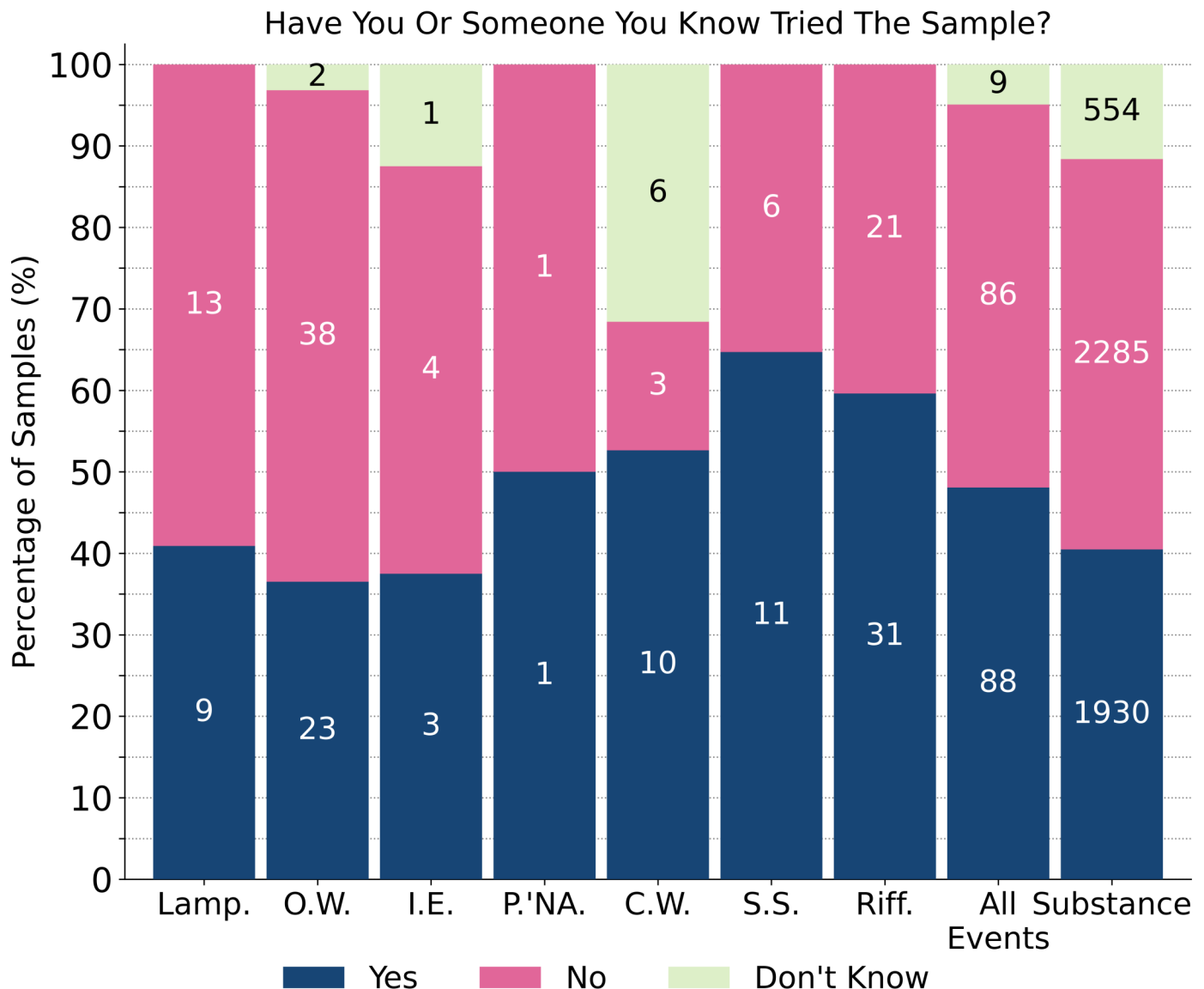


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Pre-consumption vs. Post-consumption Drug Checking

The reasons why people check their drugs both pre-consumption and post-consumption are extensive, with very broad themes of personal/peer safety and informed consumption guiding people to check their drugs. Pre-consumption drug checking can inform dosing, help maximize desired effects, help avoid unexpected experiences, or uncover the identity of “ground scores” while post-consumption drug checking can help one understand/repeat/avoid past experiences and inform future purchasing. As part of our intake survey, we ask whether or not the sample(s) being checked have been tried by the service user, or somebody they know. Here, we show the percentages and numbers of samples checked at each event that had (Dark Blue bars), and had not (Magenta bars), been tried prior to the drug check. For reference, we have also included the data from samples checked at Substance in 2022. The data are mixed, with a nearly equal number/percentages of samples being checked pre- and post-consumption, across all events. To note, not every service user responded to our intake survey, so the totals shown here may not add to the total number of samples checked at each event.



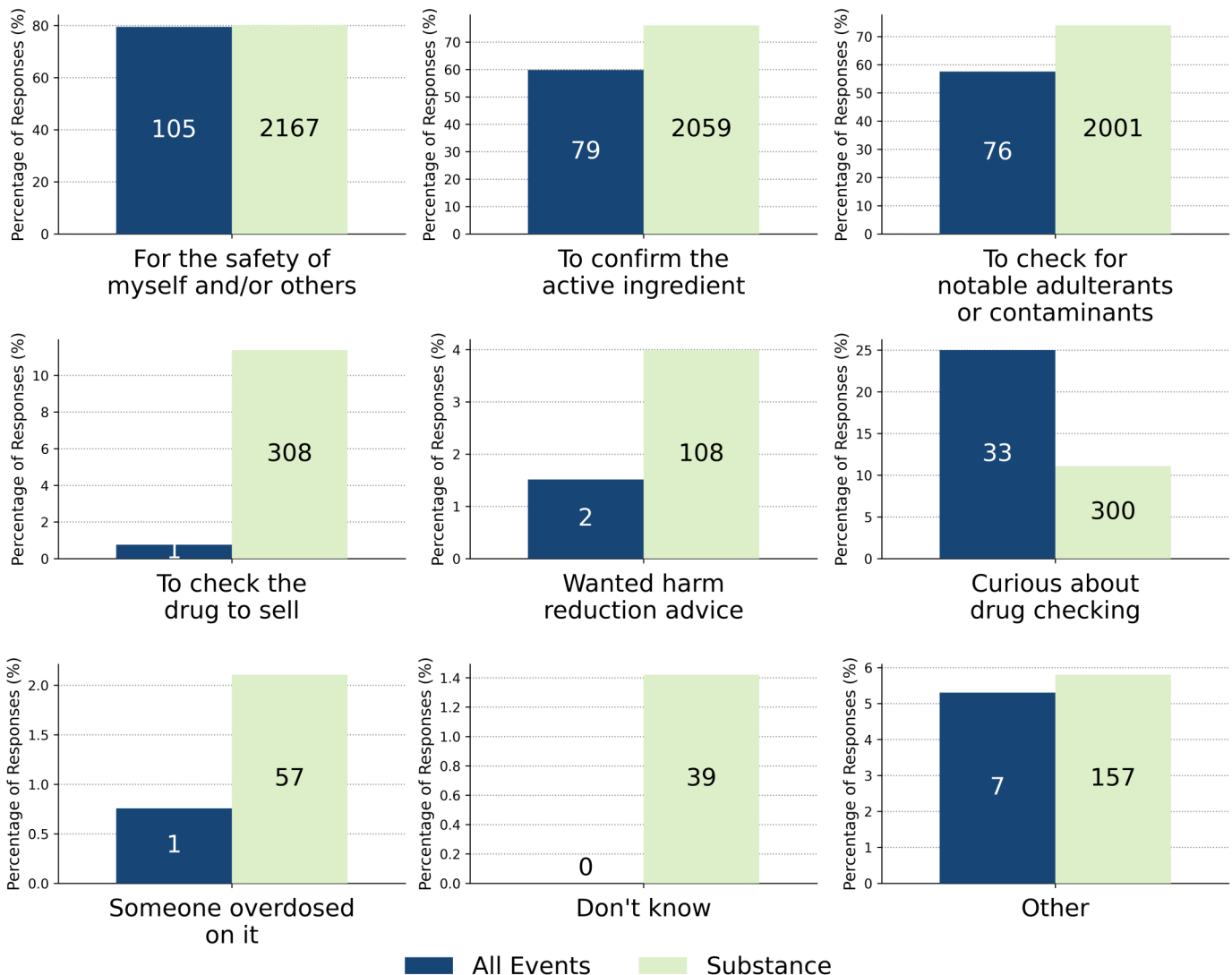
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Why were people checking their drugs?

On the previous page we postulated some reasons why people check their drugs. As another part of our intake survey, we explicitly ask why people are getting their drugs checked, with the following possible answers: *"For the safety of myself and/or others"*, *"To confirm the active ingredient (to make sure it is what you think it is)"*, *"To check for notable adulterants, or contaminants (for example, benzos or fentanyl)"*, *"To check the drug to sell"*, *"Wanted harm reduction advice"*, *"Curious about drug checking"*, *"Someone overdosed on it"*, *"Don't know"*, and *"Other"*. Service users may select multiple answers. Here, we show the percentages of total survey responses and numbers of responses that we received for each of the above categories. The data from all events have been aggregated for brevity/clarity, and the same data for samples checked at Substance are shown for reference. While *"safety"*, *"confirming the active"* and *"checking for adulterants"* were the most common responses that people gave for why they were checking their drugs at festivals and at Substance alike, we can see that *"curiosity"* was a larger driver for people to get their drugs checked at events than at Substance. Within the *"Other"* reasons category, some select responses from events included: because the sample *"Felt stronger-wanted to confirm what it was"*, *"...because the service is here."*, to *"Support drug checking as much as possible"*, *"To see if I got ripped off"*, and *"Because of science!"*



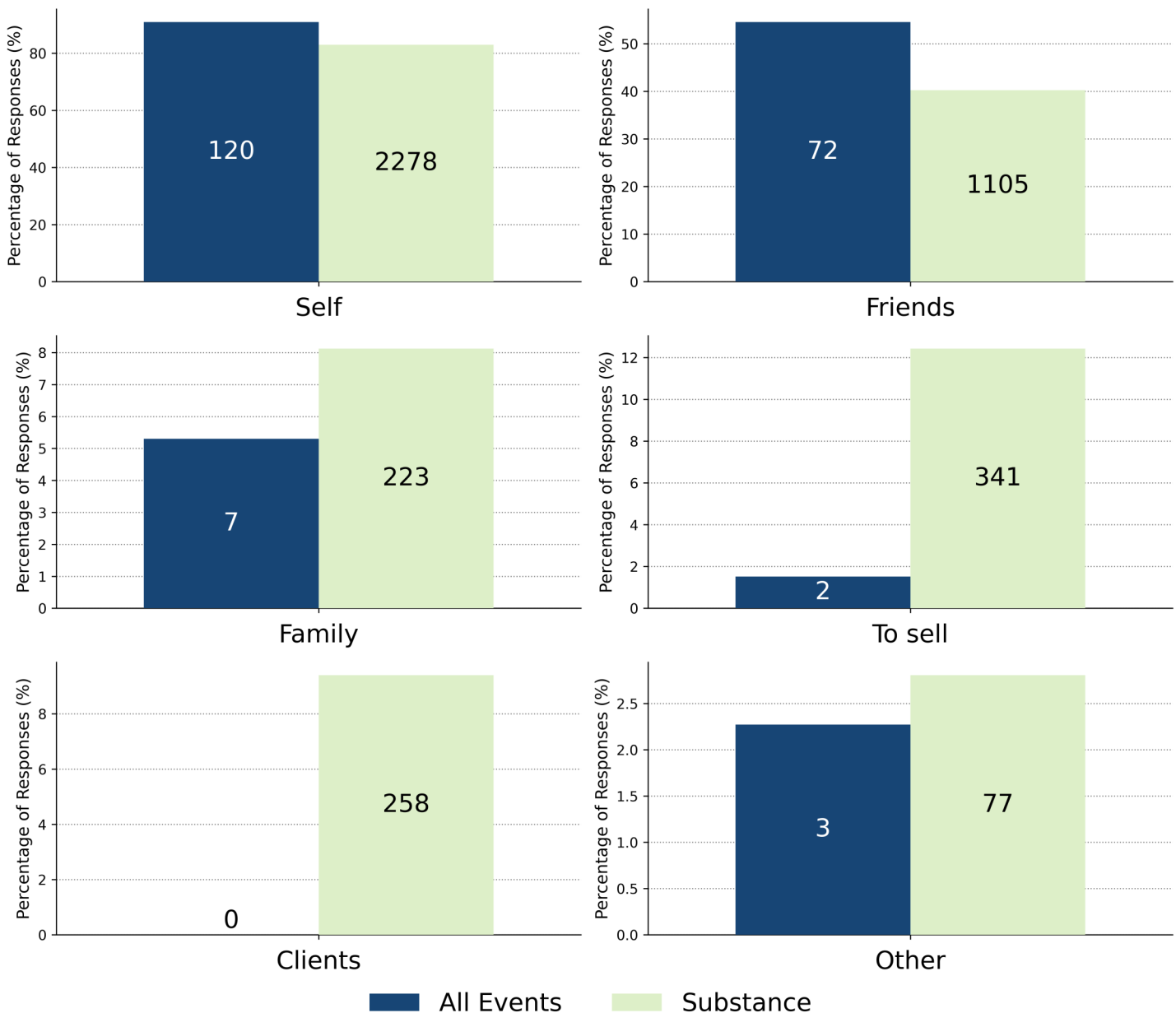
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Who were people checking their drugs for?

Similar to the previous page, we asked service users who they were getting their drugs checked for, with the following possible answers: "Self", "Friends", "Family (for example, child, parent, partner or chosen family)", "To sell", "Clients", and "Other". Service users may select multiple answers. Here, we show the percentages of total survey responses and numbers of responses that we received for each of the above categories. The data from all events have been aggregated for brevity/clarity, and the same data for samples checked at Substance are shown for reference. Of note, more than half of the service users at events responded that they were checking their sample for themselves *and for friends*. Considering a majority of the service users at events were new to drug checking and that a majority of service users were also checking for friends, these data highlight the extended reach in service provision of event-based drug checking.



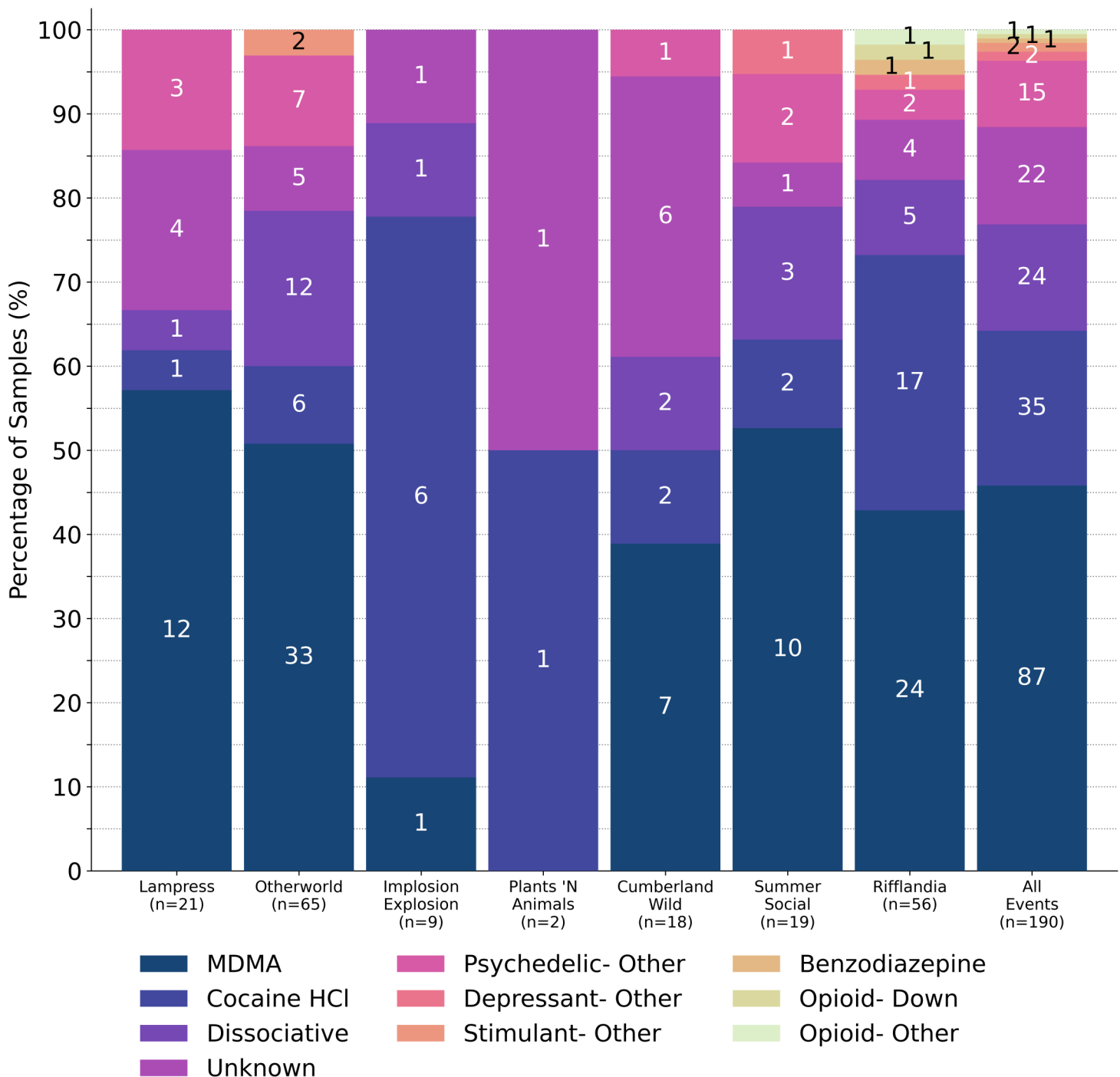
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What were people bringing to be tested?

Service users brought us a wide variety of substances that can be grouped into different drug classes. The figure below aggregates the samples we tested at each event by their “expected” substance (i.e. the drug category reported by the service user). For each event, we stack the percentage of total samples represented by each drug category, with the number of samples checked overlaid in each bar. The sum of all events is shown in the right most column. MDMA, cocaine, dissociatives (ketamine) and psychedelics were the most represented drug categories across all events.



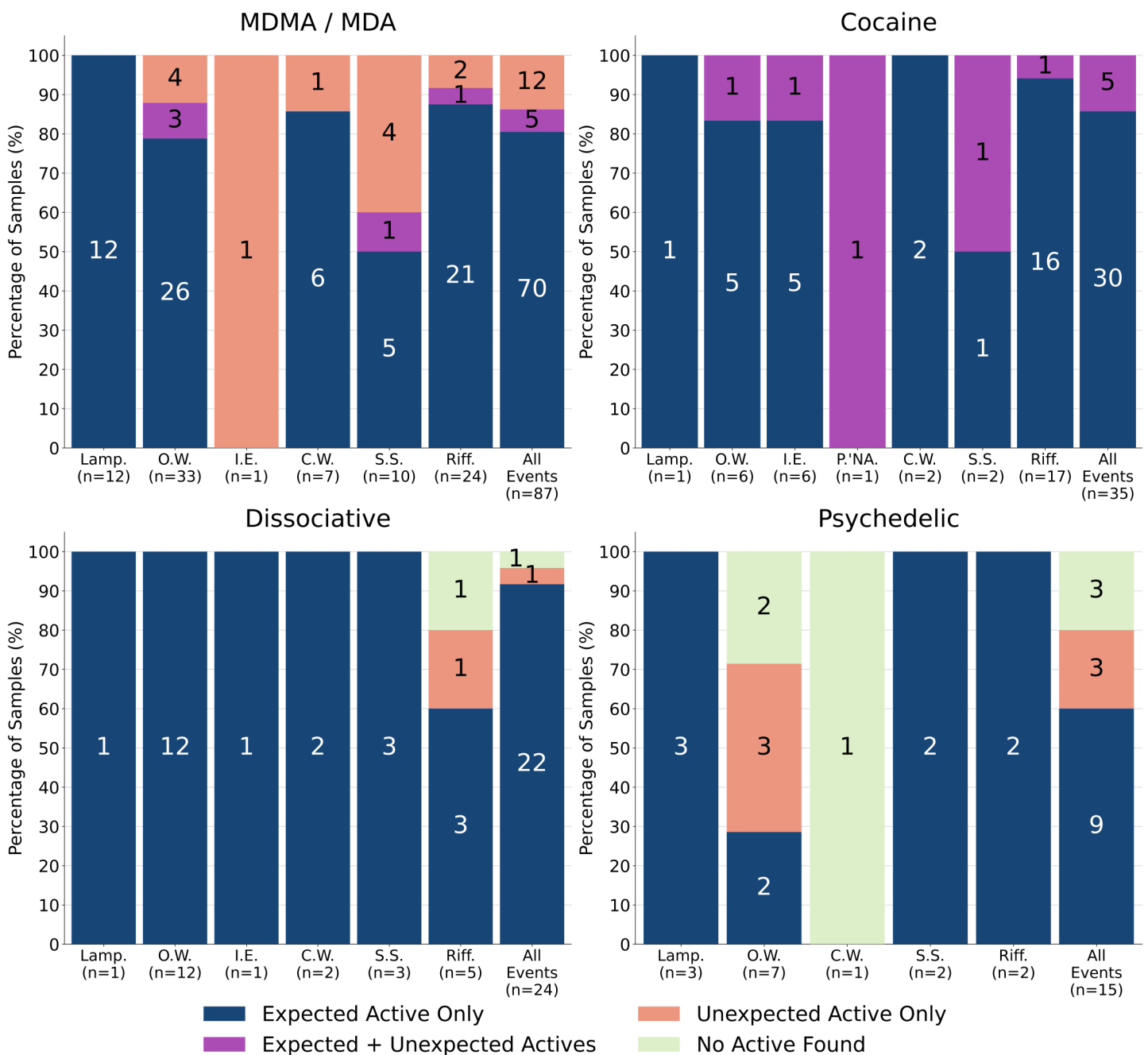
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What did we find?

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 other notable components that may cause unexpected effects. The figures below illustrate the percentages and numbers of samples tested in the four most prevalent drug categories (MDMA, cocaine, dissociatives, psychedelics), separated by event and color coded by their composition. **Dark Blue** regions group samples that were simply as expected with no other notable compounds detected, **Magenta** bars show samples that contained the expected drug *and* were contaminated with an unexpected active, **Salmon** groups samples that only contained an unexpected active (the expected drug was not found), and **Lime bars** display 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 event, we list the number of samples, and the compounds found within them.

MDMA / MDA	Lampress	Otherworld	Implosion Explosion	Cumberland Wild	Summer Social	Rifflandia
Expected Active Only	12	26		6	5	21
MDA		1		1		
MDMA	10	25		5	5	21
MDMA + Inositol	1					
MDMA + Sorbitol	1					
Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)		3			1	1
MDMA* + MDA		2			1	1
MDMA* + Ethylone		1				
Unexpected Active(s) Only		4	1	1	4	2
MDA (MDMA expected)		2	1	1	3	1
MDMA (MDA expected)		2			1	1

Cocaine (HCl or Base)	Lampress	Otherworld	Implosion Explosion	Plants 'N Animals	Cumberland Wild	Summer Social	Rifflandia
Expected Active Only	1	5	5		2	1	16
Cocaine HCl	1	5	5		2	1	16
Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)		1	1	1		1	1
Cocaine HCl* + Benzocaine		1					
Cocaine HCl* + Levamisole							1
Cocaine HCl* + Levamisole + Lidocaine			1				
Cocaine HCl* + Phenacetin			1	1		1	

Dissociative	Lampress	Otherworld	Implosion Explosion	Cumberland Wild	Summer Social	Rifflandia
Expected Active Only	1	12	1	2	3	3
Ketamine	1	12	1	2	3	3
Unexpected Active(s) Only						1
MDMA (Ketamine expected)						1
No Actives Found						1
Sodium Bicarbonate (Ketamine expected)						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.

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What did we find? - Continued

Psychedelic	Lampress	Otherworld	Cumberland Wild	Summer Social	Rifflandia
Expected Active Only	3	2		2	2
1P-LSD		1			
2C-B		1		1	2
DMT	1				
LSD	2				
Psilocybin				1	
Unexpected Active(s) Only		3			
MDMA + Lactose (2C-B expected)		3			
No Actives Found		2	1		
Microcrystalline Cellulose (2C-I expected)		1			
Water + Alcohol (LSD expected)		1	1		

Depressant - Other	Summer Social	Rifflandia
Expected Active Only	1	1
GHB	1	
Pregabalin		1

Stimulant - Other	Otherworld
Expected Active Only	2
3-MMC	1
MDPV	1

Benzodiazepine	Rifflandia
Unexpected Active(s) Only	1
Flualprazolam (alprazolam/Xanax expected)	1

Opioid - Down	Rifflandia
Expected Active Only	1
Fentanyl + Caffeine	1

Opioid - Other	Rifflandia
Expected Active Only	1
Hydromorphone	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.

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What did we find? - Continued

Unknown	Lampress	Otherworld	Implosion Explosion	Plants 'N Animals	Cumberland Wild	Summer Social	Rifflandia
Unexpected Active(s) Only	3	5	1	1	6	1	3
2C-B				1			
4-HO-MET						1	
Cocaine HCl	1		1		1		
DMT					2		
Ketamine	1						1
MDA		1			1		
MDMA	1	4			2		1
Sildenafil							1
No Actives Found	1						1
Calcium carbonate							1
Dimethyl sulfone (MSM) + Sucrose	1						

We would like to acknowledge and thank the many people who supported festival and event-based drug checking this year. A special thanks to WILD Collaborative Harm Reduction Services, AVI Health and Community Services (specifically the Comox/Courtenay office) and Island Health who provided important funding to make festival drug checking a reality.

We would also like to thank all the festival and event producers who welcomed our critical harm reduction services in their events: Rifflandia; Phillips Weekender; Lamp & the Empress Camps; Footwork & Lampchant-ed Forest; Kindle Arts Society & the Otherworld Harm Reduction Team; Cumberland Wild; and Plant-based Productions. We hope to continue offering festival and event-based drug checking services on Vancouver Island.

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



Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project: Event Drug Checking 2022 - Victoria, BC: Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project; 2022.