

# Substance

## Drug Checking

### 2023 Event and Festival Report

In Canada, the practice of drug checking has its origins in the realms of rave and festival culture. In British Columbia (BC), the dedicated team at ANKORS Harm Reduction, comprised of staff and volunteers, blazed the trail for festival harm reduction and drug checking at the Shambhala Music Festival, establishing a robust drug checking program that has thrived for nearly two decades. Increasingly, event organizers recognize the inherent value in offering harm reduction services, including community-based drug checking. Such services not only promote safer drug use practices at these gatherings but also serve as visible focal points for fostering community connections and reducing stigma. They play a crucial role in educating individuals and their peers about the composition of substances, monitoring the unregulated drug supply, and facilitating health interventions.

In the summer of 2023, Substance provided drug checking at 10 events around Vancouver Island in collaboration with Island Health, AVI Health and Community Services, and WILD Collaborative Harm Reduction. Relative to the summer of 2022, we checked 66% more samples and helped 63% more people learn about what was in their substances.

## 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
Lamplight Year One	May 20 - 22, 2023	Lake Cowichan, BC	32	48
Otherworld	June 08 - 12, 2023	Lake Cowichan, BC	76	121
TILT at Phillips	July 07 - 09, 2023	Victoria, BC	13	13
Salt Spring Island Pride	July 28 - 30, 2023	Salt Spring Island, BC	1	1
REVERB at Phillips	August 11 - 13, 2023	Victoria, BC	4	5
Samsara Music Festival	August 11 - 13, 2023	Port Renfrew, BC	16	26
Cumberland Wild	August 19 - 20, 2023	Cumberland, BC	15	21
International Overdose Awareness Day BBQ	August 31, 2023	Victoria, BC	6	9
Rifflandia Electric Ave	September 15 - 17, 2023	Victoria, BC	37	43
Rifflandia The Park	September 07 - 09, 2023	Victoria, BC	20	28
<b>Total</b>			<b>220</b>	<b>315</b>

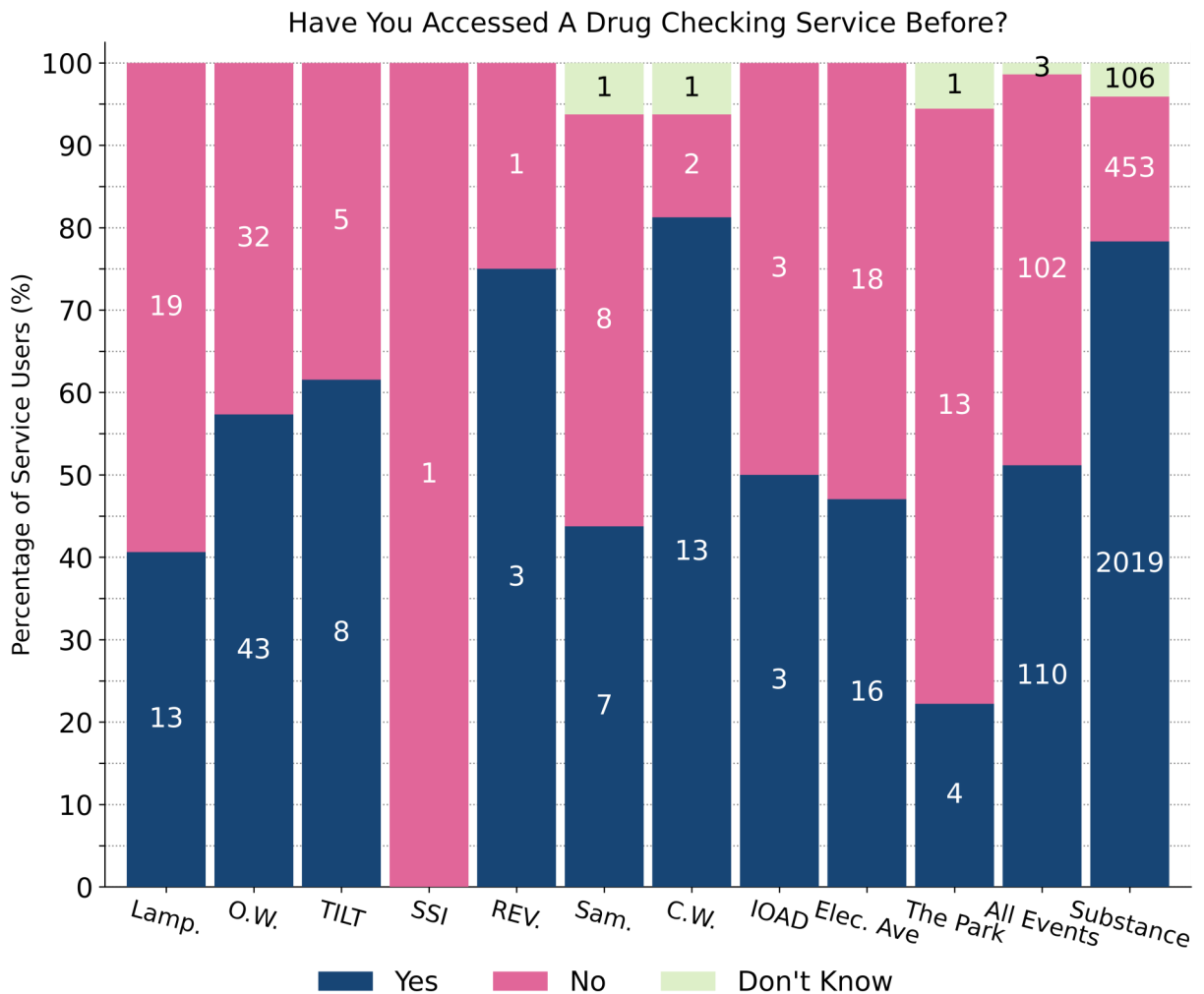
# Substance

## Drug Checking

### 2023 Event and Festival Report

#### 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”) between March 2023 and September 2023. 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, 47% (102/215) of service users who responded to the intake survey had not used a drug checking service before. Compared to the data collected at our storefront in 2023, only 18% (453/2578) 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.



# Substance

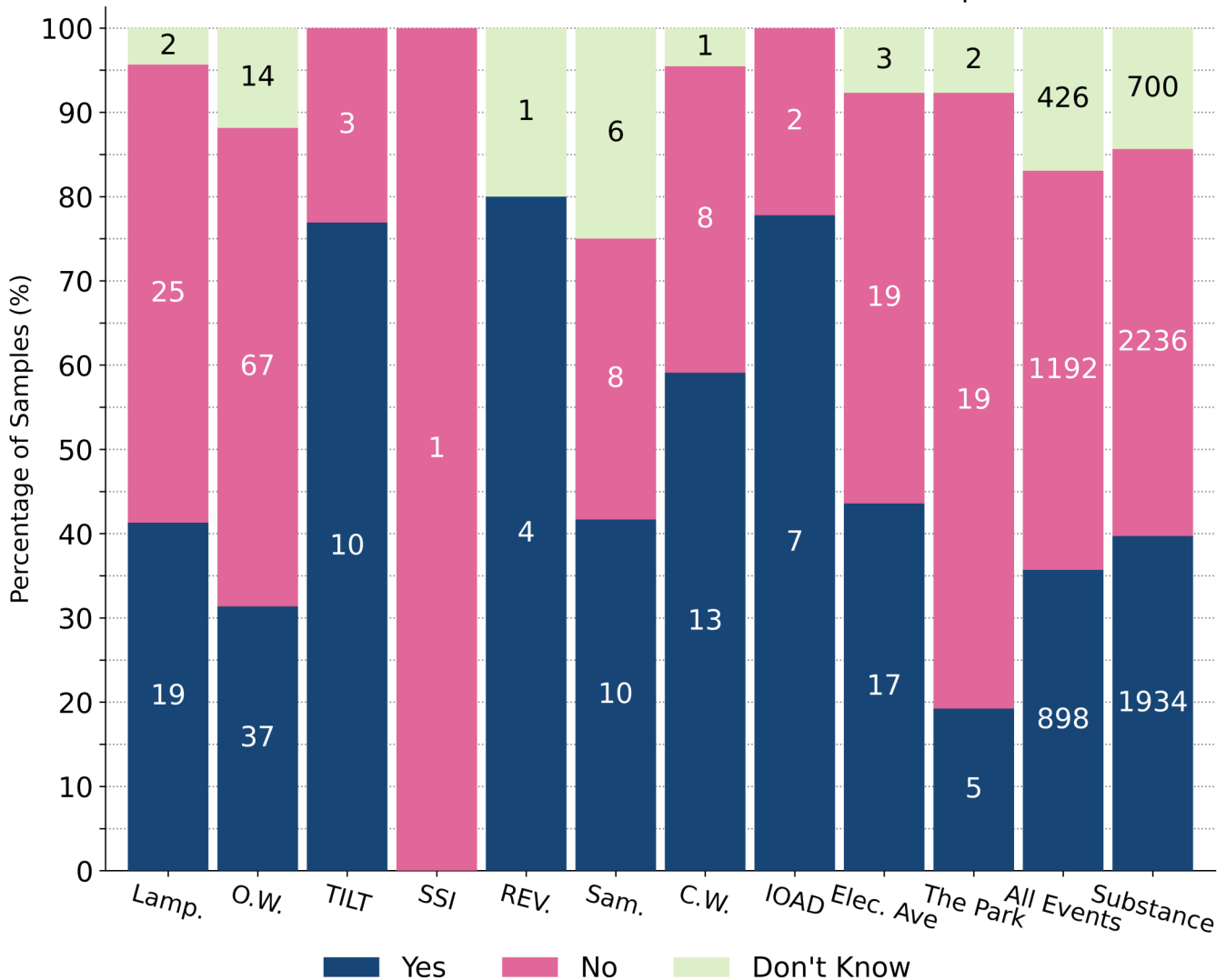
## Drug Checking

### 2023 Event and Festival Report

#### Pre-consumption vs. Post-consumption Drug Checking

Checking your drugs can be a deeply personal manner, with many different reasons as to why one might want to check their drugs. For example, one may want to better understand what their sample is before taking it or to see if what they bought was as advertised. Others may have already tried their sample and are checking it to gain insight into their experience or refine their taste 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 during March - September 2023. We can see that there is a wide variety of responses with 46% of all event goers having checked their sample pre-consumption and 40% of event goers having checked their sample post-consumption. When compared with the data from Substance, we can see that this is roughly equal to what is seen at our service.

Have You Or Someone You Know Tried The Sample?



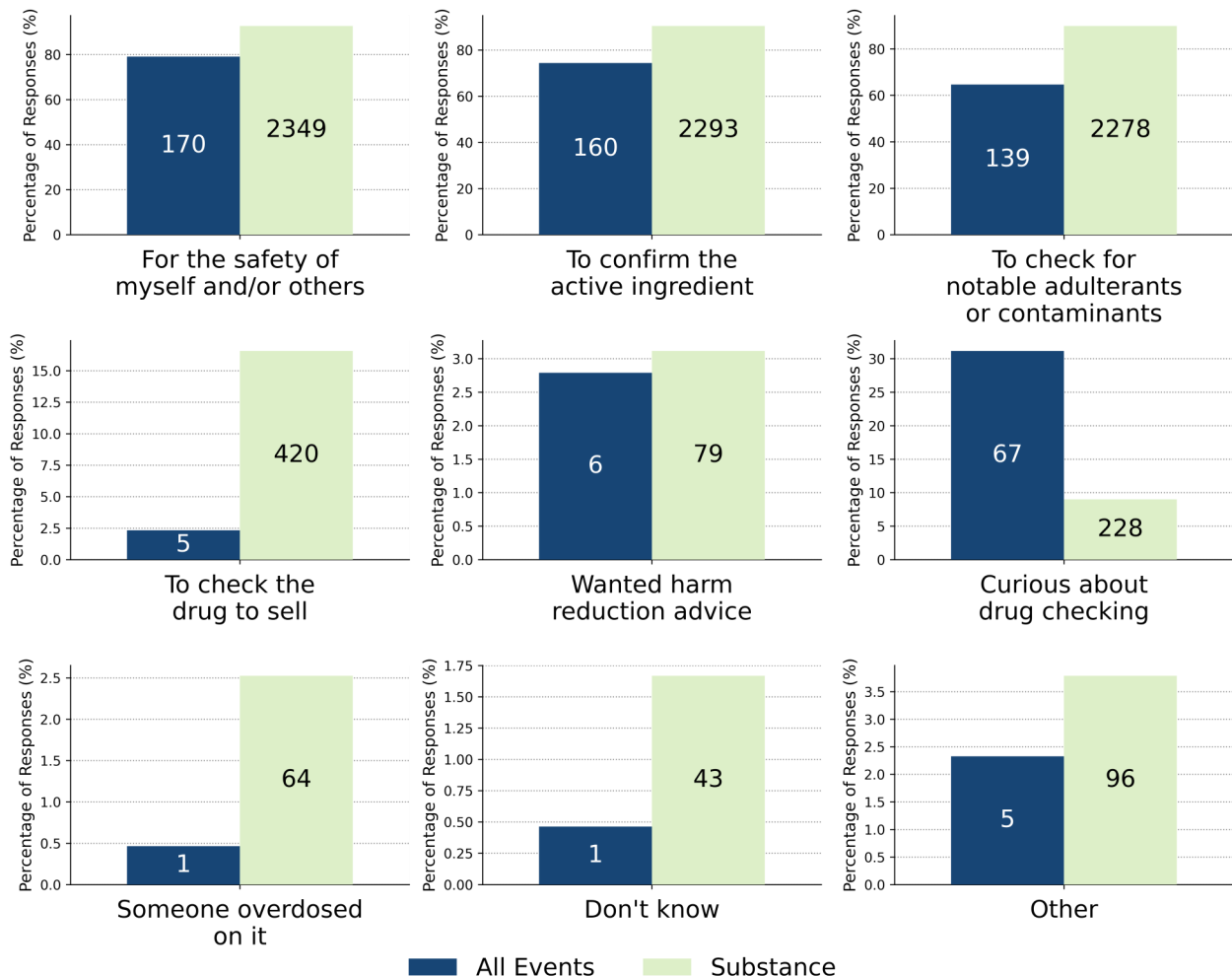
# Substance

## Drug Checking

### 2023 Event and Festival Report

#### Why were people checking their drugs?

On the previous page we theorized why someone might check their drugs. However, this was just to get you thinking because as part of our intake survey we 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", and the possibility to select *multiple answers*. On this page we show the proportion of total survey responses and number of responses that we obtained for each possible answer. 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, the responses from events included: "to confirm an unknown", "Want to find out what it is", "no label", "to use them", and "found drug"



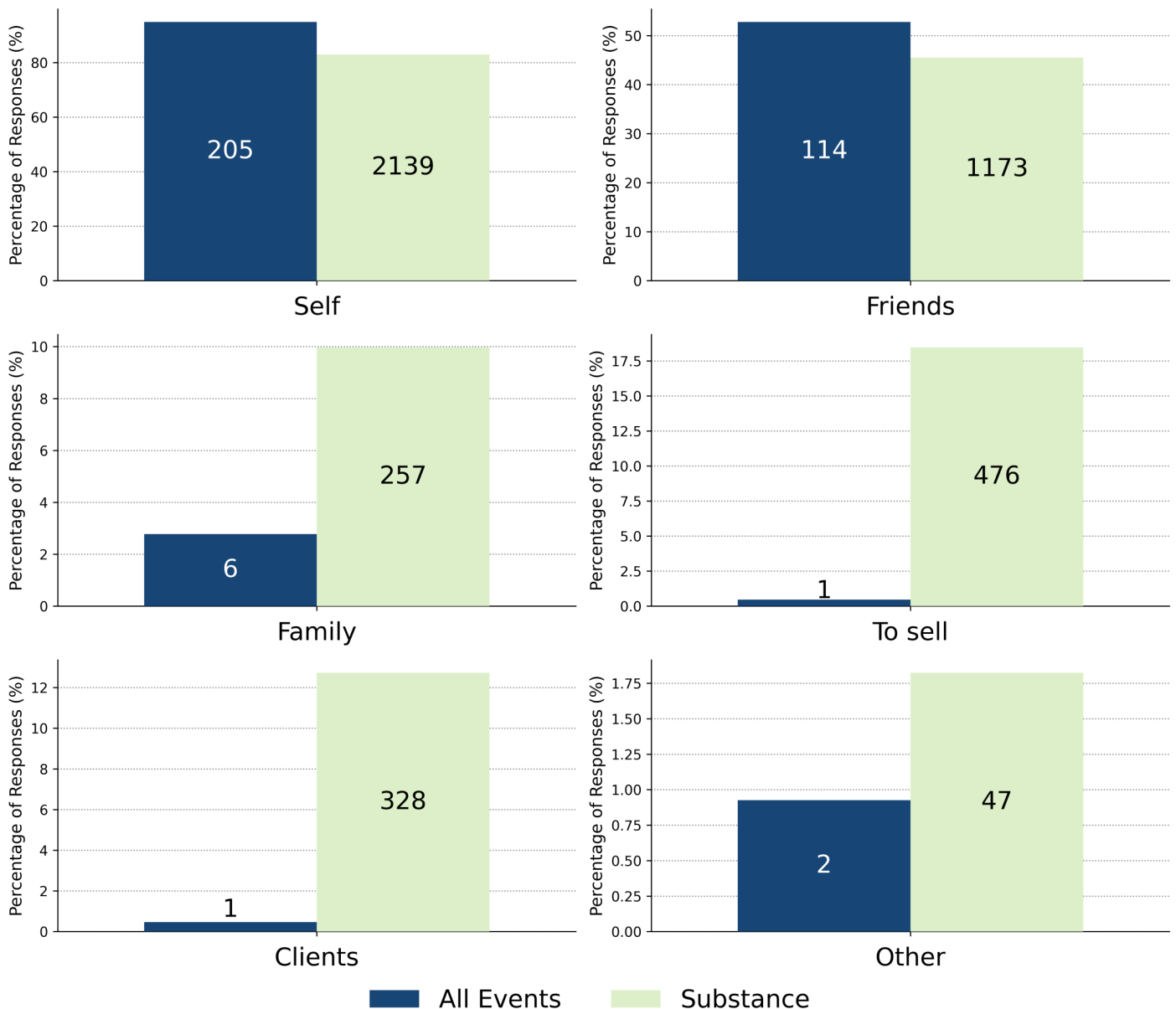
# Substance

## Drug Checking

### 2023 Event and Festival Report

#### 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.



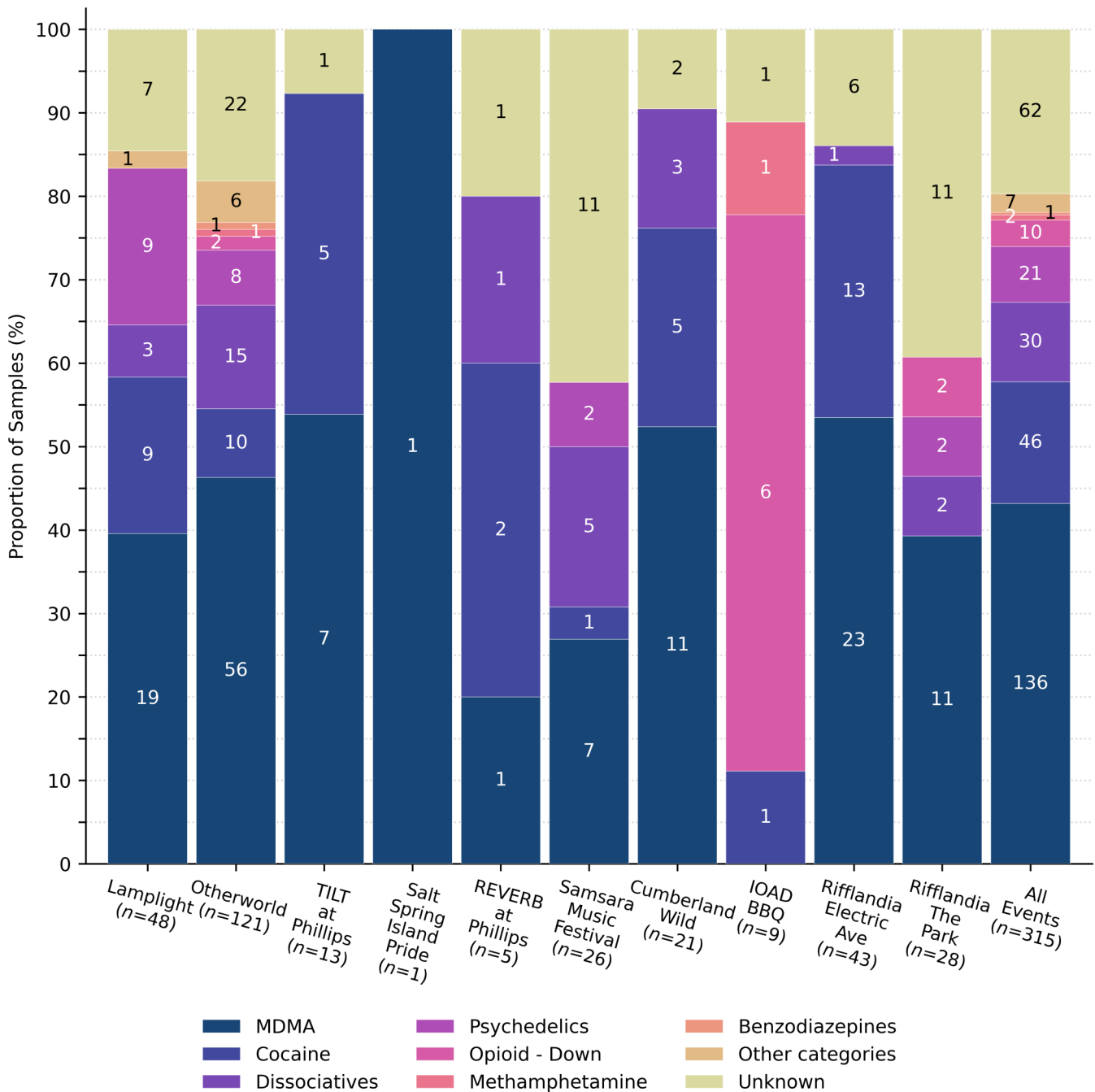
# Substance

## Drug Checking

### 2023 Event and Festival Report

#### 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.

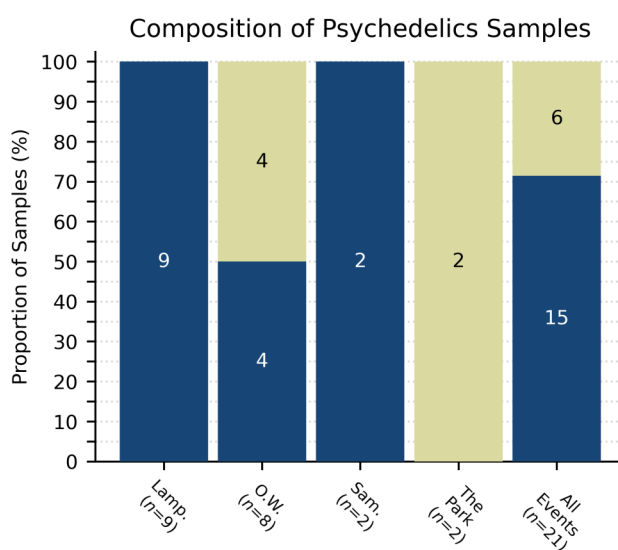
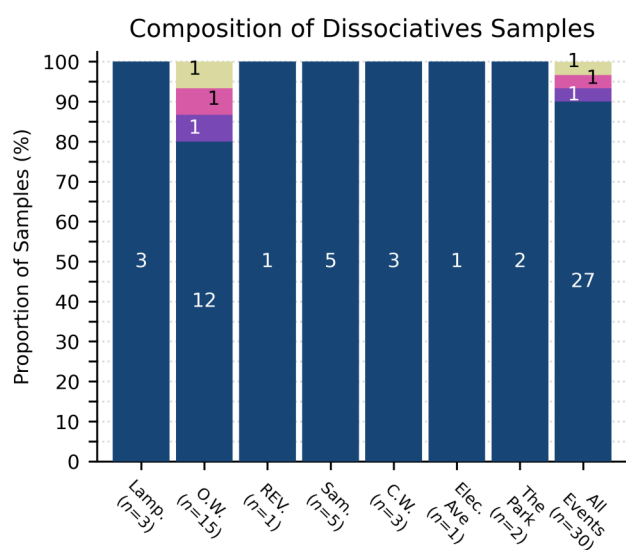
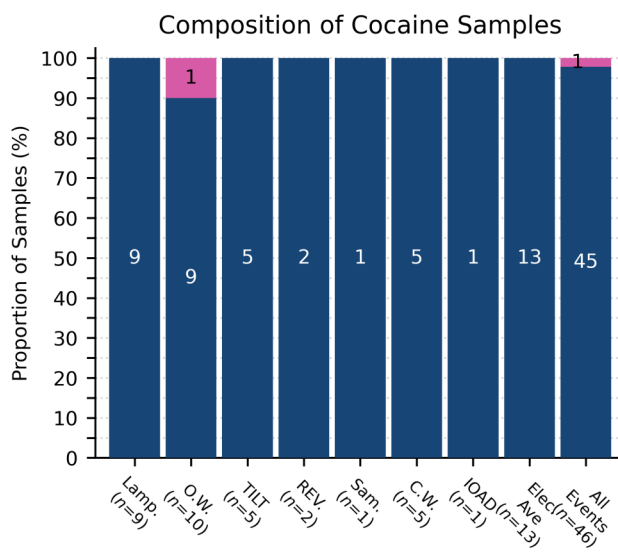
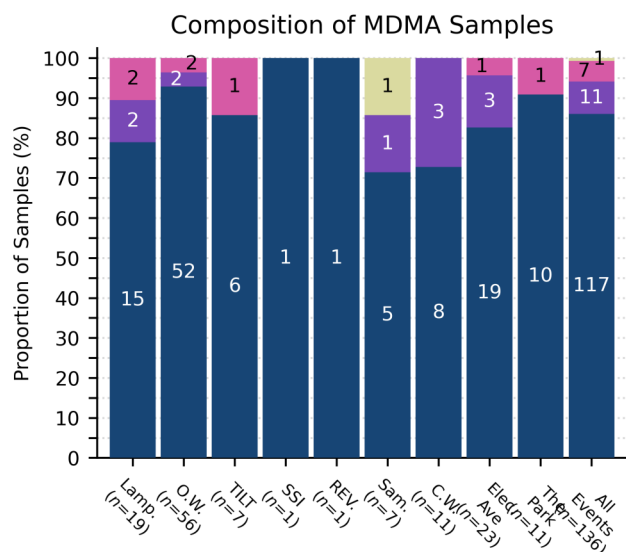


# Substance Drug Checking

## 2023 Event and Festival Report

### 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.



■ Expected Active Only     
 ■ Unexpected Active(s) Only     
 ■ Inactive(s) Only  
■ Expected + Unexpected Actives     
 ■ Unknown composition

# Substance

## Drug Checking

### 2023 Event and Festival Report

## 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.

<b>MDMA / MDA</b>	Lamp.	O.W.	TILT	SSI	REV.	Sam.	C.W.	IOAD	Elec. Ave	The Park
<b>Expected Active Only</b>										
MDA		3								
MDMA	15	49	6	1	1	5	8		19	10
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>										
MDMA* + MDA	1	2					1		1	
MDMA* + Ketamine									1	
MDA + Ketamine							1			
MDMA + Cocaine HCl	1						1			
MDMA + Cocaine Base + MDA									1	
MDMA + Cathinone (Undifferentiated)						1				
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>										
MDA (MDMA expected)		1	1						1	1
MDMA (MDA expected)	1	1								
<b>Inactive(s) Only</b>										
Sucrose						1				

<b>Cocaine (HCl or Base)</b>	Lamp.	O.W.	TILT	SSI	REV.	Sam.	C.W.	IOAD	Elec. Ave	The Park
<b>Expected Active Only</b>										
Cocaine Base								1		
Cocaine HCl	9	9	5		2	1	5		13	
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>										
MDMA + MDA		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.



# Substance

## Drug Checking

2023 Event and Festival Report

### What did we find? - Continued

Dissociatives	Lamp.	O.W.	REV.	Sam.	Elec. Ave	Stimulants - Other	O.W.
<b>Expected Active Only</b>						<b>Expected Active Only</b>	
Ketamine	3	12	1	5	1	3-MMC [Metaphedrone]	1
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>						Amphetamine	
Ketamine + MDA		1				<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>						Cocaine HCl	
O-PCE [Deschloro-N-ethyl-ketamine]		1					1

Psychedelics	Lamp.	O.W.	Sam.	Depressants - Other	Lamp.	O.W.
<b>Expected Active Only</b>				<b>Expected Active Only</b>		
2C-B		3		GHB	1	
4-HO-MET [Metocin, Colour]	1			Phenibut		1
5-MeO-DIPT [Foxy]		1		<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>		
5-MeO-MIPT [Moxy]	8			GHB + GBL		1
LSD [acid]			2	<b>Inactive(s) Only</b>		
<b>Inactive(s) Only</b>				Starch (Pregabalin expected)		
Inconclusive (LSD expected)		2				1
Microcrystalline cellulose (2C-B expected)						

Opioid - Down	O.W.	IOAD	The Park
<b>Expected Active Only</b>			
Fentanyl			1
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>			
Fentanyl + Benzodiazepine (Undifferentiated)	1		
Fentanyl + Benzodiazepine (Undifferentiated), Fluorofentanyl		1	
Fentanyl + Bromazolam, Fluorofentanyl		4	
Fentanyl + Fluorofentanyl		1	
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>			
Fluorofentanyl	1		

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## 2023 Event and Festival Report

### What did we find? - Continued

Methamphetamine	O.W.	IOAD
<b>Expected Active Only</b>		
Methamphetamine	1	
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>		
Methamphetamine + Fentanyl or analogue		1

Unknown	Lamp.	O.W.	TILT	SSI	REV.	Sam.	C.W.	IOAD	Elec. Ave	The Park
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>										
Cocaine HCl	1	2			1				4	5
Cocaine HCl + Phenacetin		1								
Ketamine	3	1				5				3
Ketamine + MDMA	1									
MDA	1		1			2	1		1	
MDMA		14				2	1		1	2
Sildenafil [Viagra] + Tadalafil [Cialis]						1				
Tadalafil [Cialis]		1								
<b>Inactive(s) Only</b>										
Inconclusive		3				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 event 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: Lamplit; Kindle Arts Society & the Otherworld Harm Reduction Team; Phillips Backyard; Diverse and Inclusive Salt Spring Island; Wildlife Division; Cumberland Village Works, Mt. Eliah; QomQem; and Rifflandia. 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](https://substance.uvic.ca)

Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project: Event Drug Checking 2023 - Victoria, BC: Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project; 2023.