

# Substance Drug Checking

## 2024 Event and Festival Report

For more than two decades, drug checking and music festivals have coexisted in Canada. Over these past two decades, drug checking has become an integral part of music festivals and offers attendees the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge about the substance and its composition. By providing accurate information about the substances being consumed attendees can make informed decisions about their use and can reduce the risk of adverse health effects. Drug checking also aims to foster a connection to community and to reduce the stigma of drug use by engaging in meaningful conversations and being present at festivals and events, which is why in addition to the seven festivals we attended this summer, we also attended two community events.

In this report, we'll examine which events were the busiest, if event based drug checking reaches new service users, whether or not people are checking their substances before or after consumption, why people get their drugs checked, who people are checking their drugs for, and finally we'll take a look at the drugs people got checked including what we found in them.

### Service Provision by Event

The table below highlights each event, what days the event ran, and the total number of service users and samples checked at each event. This data is broken down by the expected substance class later in this report.

Event Name	Event Date(s)	Event Location	Service Users	Samples Checked
Otherworld	Jun 06 - 09, 2024	Cowichan Valley, BC	78	115
TILT at Phillips	Jul 05 - 07, 2024	Victoria, BC	3	3
Pachena Bay Music Festival	Jul 19 - 21, 2024	Bamfield, BC	29	39
Indigenous Wellness Day	Jul 22, 2024	Victoria, BC	3	3
Blackberry Jam Music Festival	Aug 03 - 04, 2024	Denman Island, BC	1	1
REVERB at Phillips	Aug 09 - 11, 2024	Victoria, BC	10	11
Samsara Music Festival	Aug 09 - 11, 2024	Jordan River, BC	30	43
International Overdose Awareness Day BBQ	Aug 29, 2024	Victoria, BC	4	8
Rifflandia Music Festival	Sep 13 - 15, 2024	Victoria, BC	23	28
<b>Total</b>			<b>181</b>	<b>251</b>

For the second year in a row, Otherworld was our busiest event of the summer. Over the course of four days, we checked a total of 115 samples brought in by 78 unique Otherworldians! The second busiest event was Samsara Music Festival, where we checked 43 samples over the course of three days. Samsara was also the second busiest event last festival season. The third busiest event was Pachena Bay Music Festival, we checked 39 samples there.

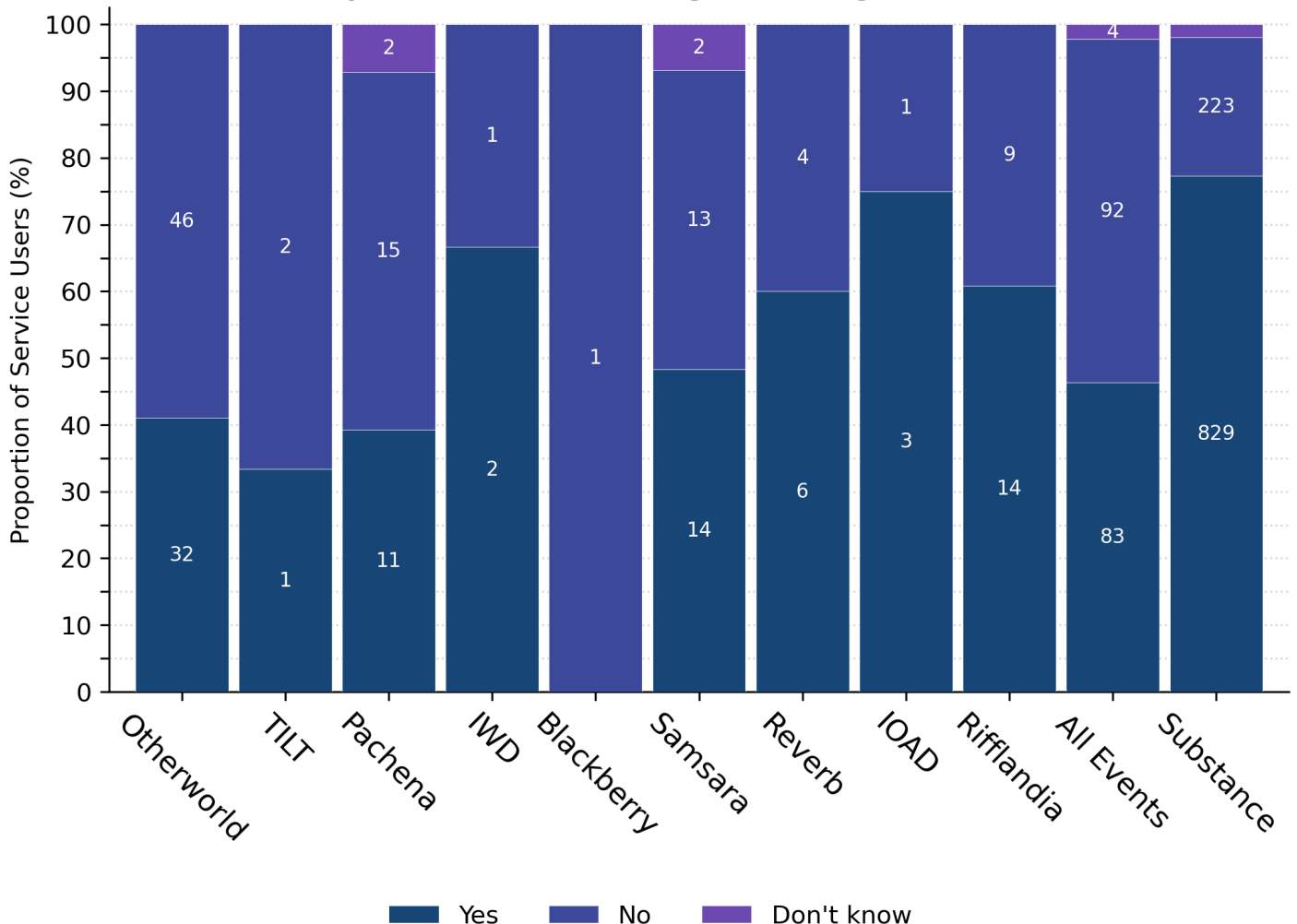
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### Does event based drug checking reach new service users?

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). The following figure shows the number of service users who **have** and **have not** accessed a drug checking service before. We have also included the data from service users who visited our storefront in Victoria (“Substance”) between June 2024 and September 2024. For many events, a majority of service users had not accessed a drug checking service before, and that across all events, 51.4% (92/179) of service users who responded to the intake survey had not used a drug checking service before. When compared to the data collected at our storefront service, only 20.9% (223/1073) of those service users were new to drug checking. This suggests that event based drug checking 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?



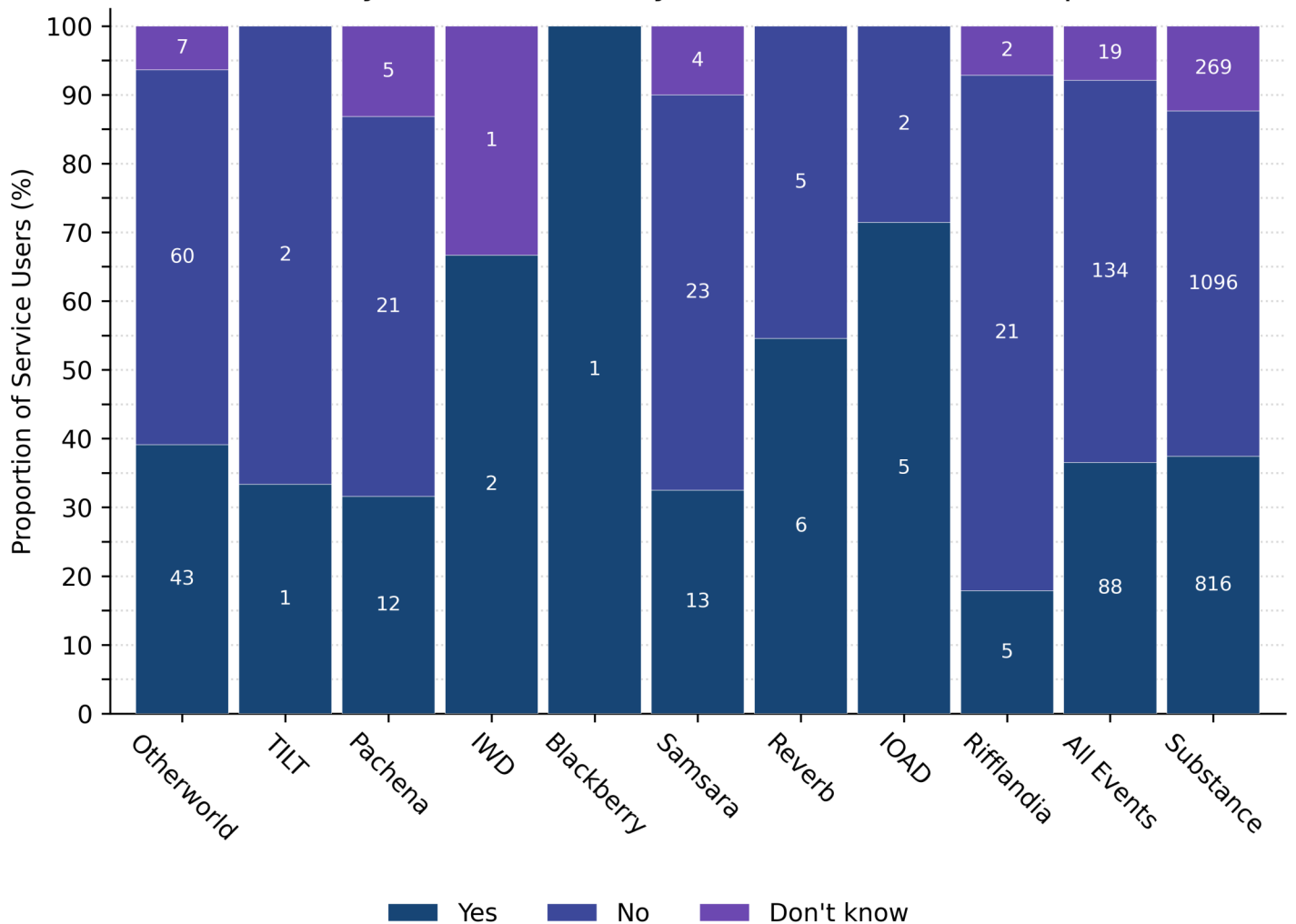
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### Pre-consumption vs. or Post-consumption Drug Checking

People may want to check their drugs for a variety of different reasons, and we will examine some of those reasons on the following page. One possible reason would be to better inform themselves prior to taking the drug. On the other hand, maybe the sample was already taken and they wish to better understand why their experience on the substance. Here, we show the percentages and numbers of samples checked at each event that **had** and **had not** been tried prior to the drug check. Overall, there is fairly wide range of responses at each event, with 55.6% of all event goers having not tried their sample and 36.5% having tried their sample. When compared with data collected at our storefront, we have see that this roughly the same distribution of answers, with 50.3% of all storefront service users having not tried their sample and 37.4% having tried their sample.

Have you or someone you know tried the sample?

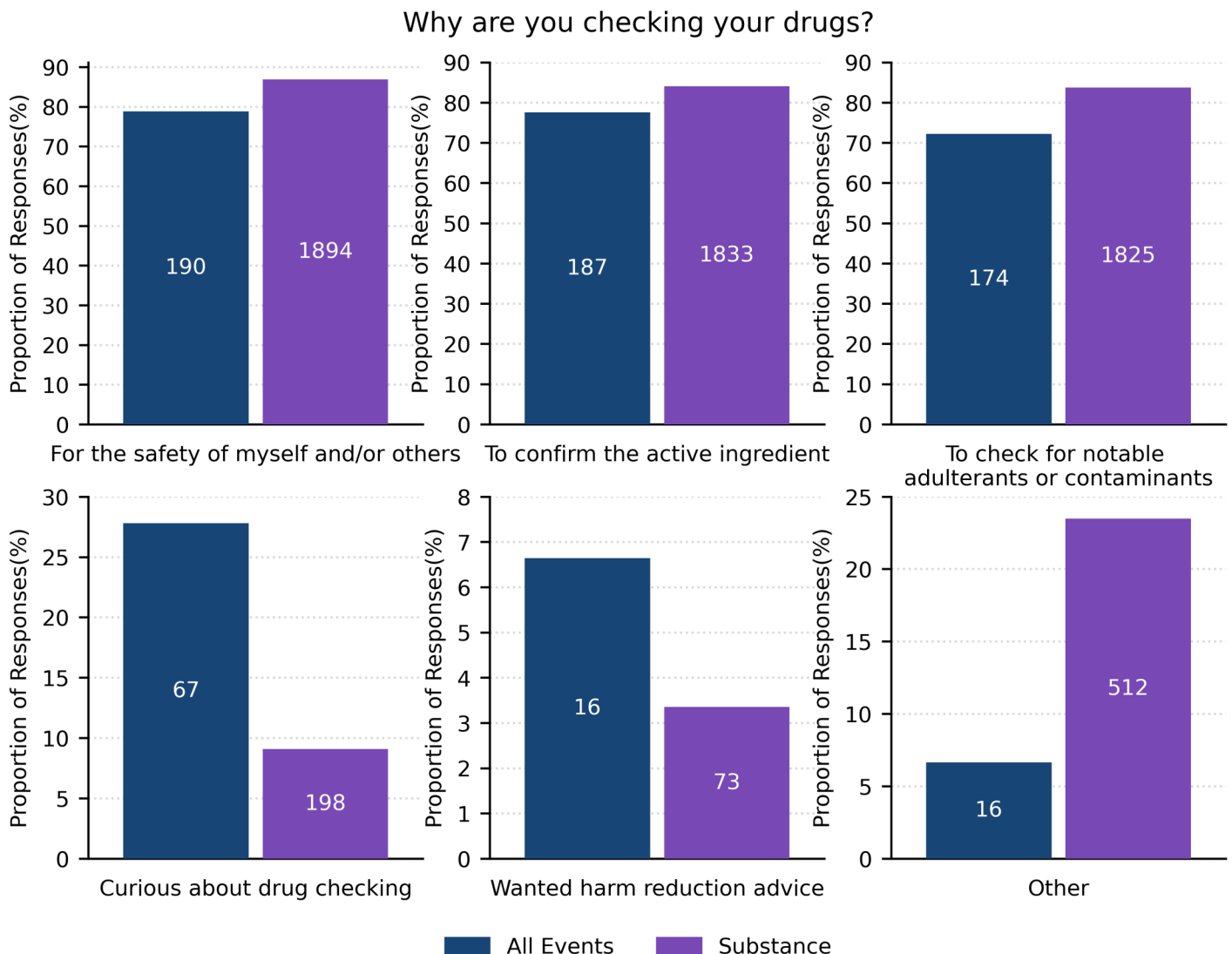


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### Why were people checking their drugs?

On the previous page we examined when in relation to taking a sample did people get their drugs checked, as part of this, we theorized why someone might check their drugs. As part of our intake survey we ask “Why are you checking your drugs?” with the possible answers of: “For the safety of myself and/or others”, “To confirm the active ingredient”, “To check for notable adulterants, or contaminants”, “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. For each possible answer we show the proportion of total responses, aggregated for each event, and compared to the data collected at Substance. 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” and “harm reduction advice” was a larger driver for people to get their drugs checked at events than at Substance.



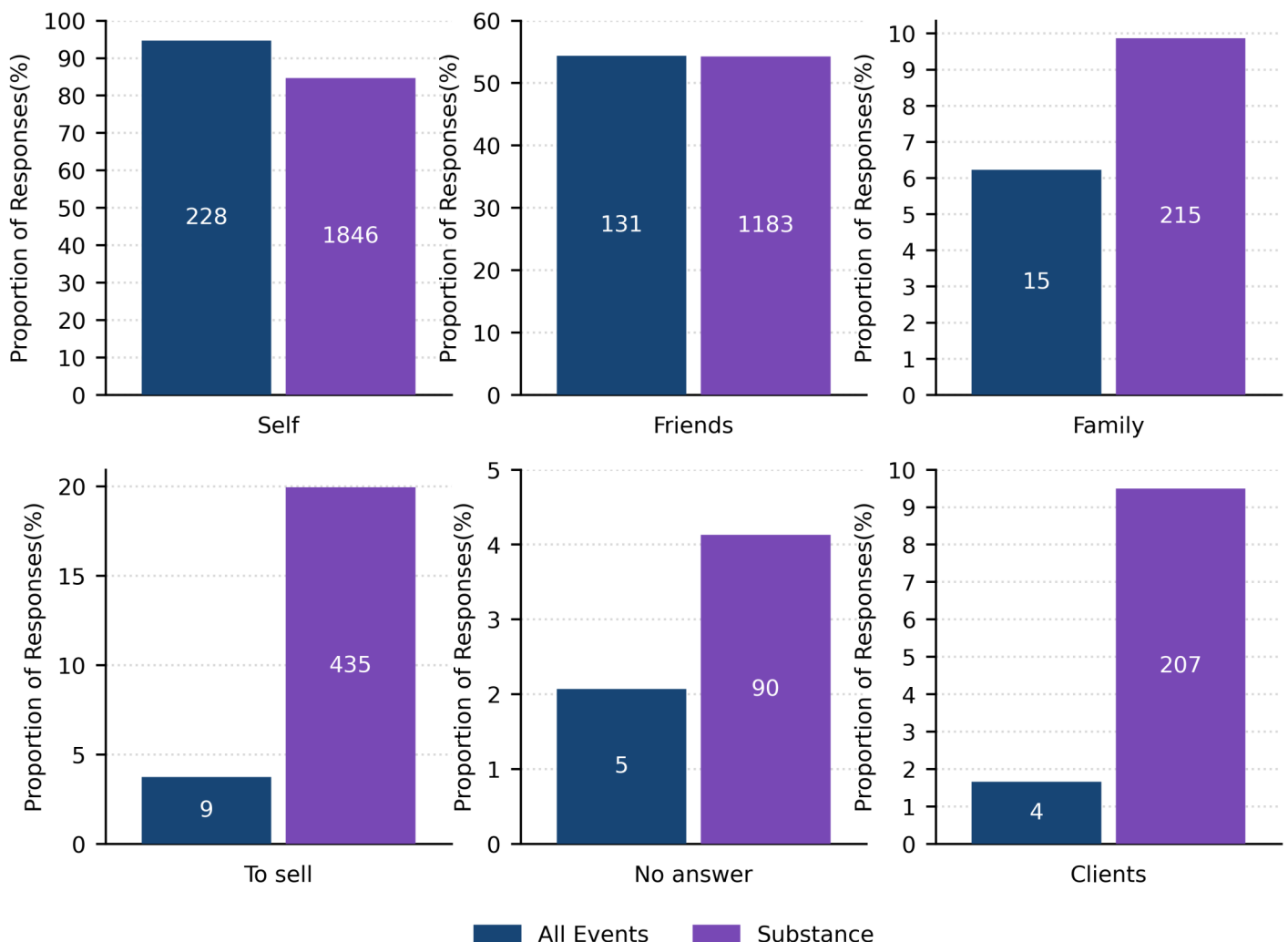
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### Who were people checking their drugs for?

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", "To sell", "Clients", "Other", and the option to select multiple answers. For each possible answer we show the proportion of total responses, aggregated for each event, and compared to the data collected at Substance. 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.

Who are you checking this sample for?



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### Otherworld Follow Up Surveys

In addition to the survey questions covered on pages 2-5 of this report, we also asked additional survey questions following the completion of the drug checking to our service users at Otherworld. We aimed to examine the value of festival-based drug checking at our busiest event of the summer.

We asked three questions regarding the value of festival-based drug checking: “Has this service met your expectations?”, “How useful are these drug checking results for you?”, and “Overall, how useful is this service for you?”. Of the 38 post-check surveys conducted, 89.5% (34/38) of respondents strongly agreed that the service met their expectations while 10.5% (4/38) agreed that the service met their expectations. As for the usefulness of the drug checking results and the overall usefulness of the service, 97.4% (37/38) found both the drug checking results they received and the service as a whole very useful, with the remaining respondent finding both their results and the service somewhat useful.

In addition to this, we asked service users if they planned to do anything differently now that they had received their drug checking results, with a response rate of 55.3% (21/38). One-third of responses to this question referenced making use of drug checking services more often, with one respondent stating they would “Get [my drugs] checked more often” and another stating they would “try out the Victoria location.” Other responses included “[I] will feel more peaceful”, “[I] feel more confident taking the substance”, and “Use as planned, if it had been anything unexpected I would have disposed of it.” These responses highlight how drug checking can ease the mind of the service user and possibly contribute to a better mindset before taking a substance.

Finally, we asked, “How effective do you think drug checking services are for lowering harm from drugs?” A majority of respondents (33/38) believed that drug checking services are very effective at reducing drug related harms. The remaining respondents believed that drug checking services were somewhat effective (3/38) and somewhat ineffective (1/38). The remaining respondent skipped the question.

Overall, the responses that we collected suggest that festival drug checking is highly useful and of value to event attendees. Overall, participants who had their samples checked at Otherworld felt at ease and a sense of peace regarding the safety of their samples.

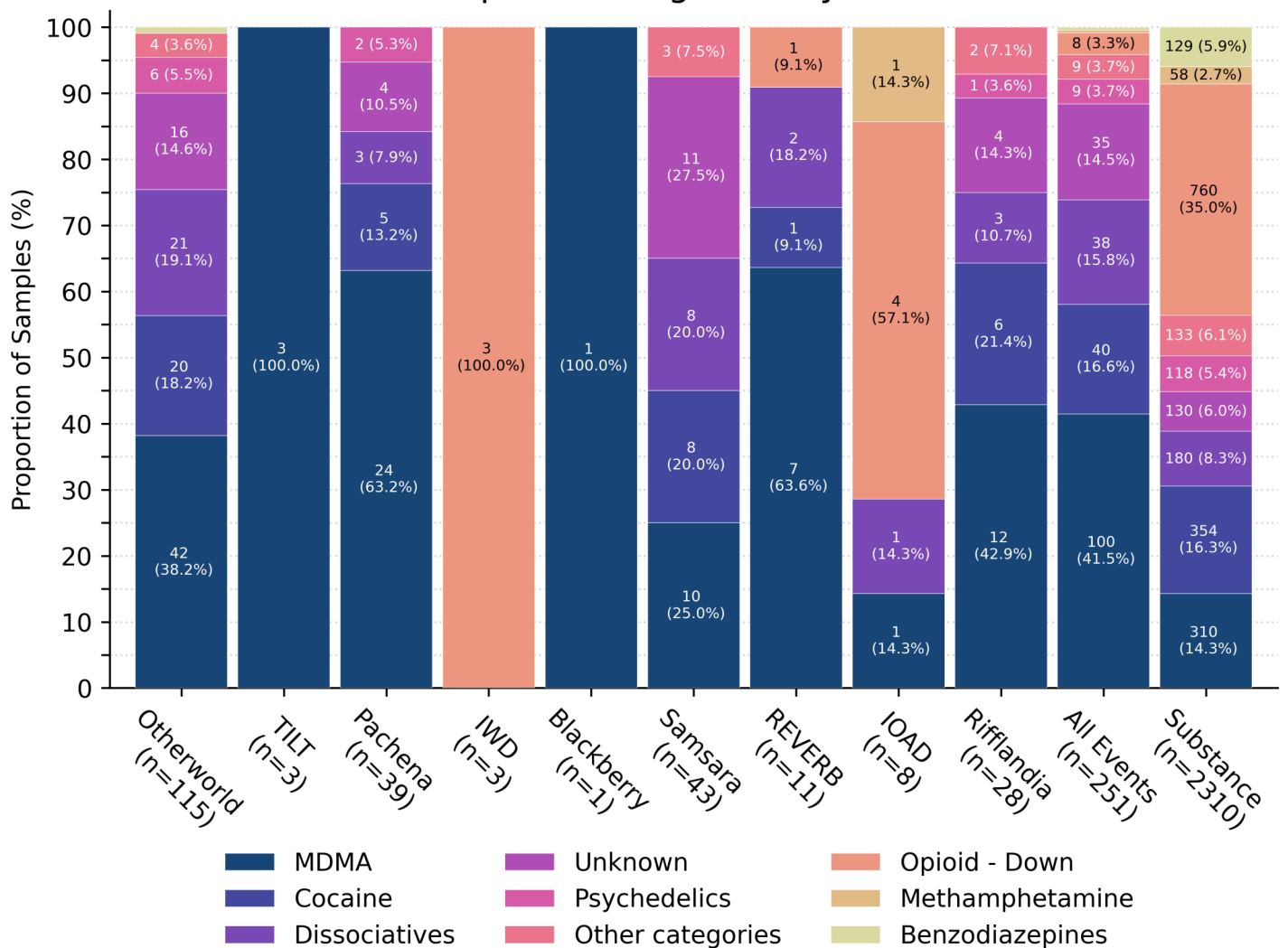
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### What were people bringing to be checked?

The figure below aggregates the samples we checked at each event by their “expected” substance class (i.e. the drug class reported to us 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 and their respective relative proportions overlaid in each bar. Proportions less than 1% are omitted for clarity. The sum of all events is shown in the right most column. The most commonly checked class of samples was MDMA, cocaine, and dissociatives. Samples considered “Unknown” were also commonly checked, these were likely samples that were lost and found, a.k.a “ground scores.” This spread of expected substance classes is typical of event based drug checking. The two outliers to this trend are Indigenous Wellness Day and the International Overdose Awareness Day BBQ which had a higher proportion of down samples. This is likely due to the drug checking at these events being more so community based than event based.

Expected drug class by event

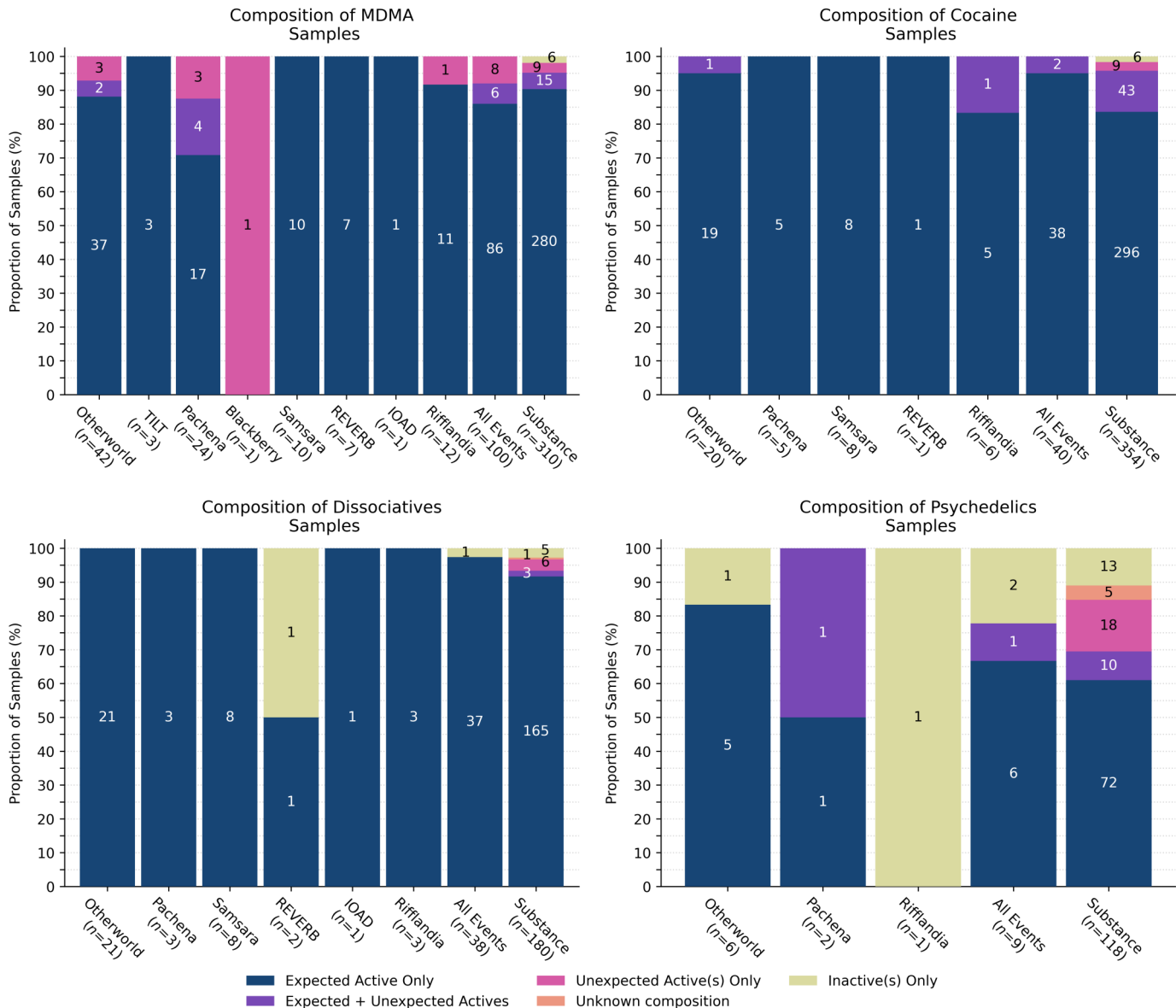


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### What did we find?

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 active and an unexpected active, **Pink** groups samples that only contained an unexpected active (the expected drug was not found), **Orange** groups samples that had an “unknown” composition, these samples were expected to be unknown and thus we cannot determine their composition, finally **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 active compounds found within them.

MDMA/MDA	Other-world	TILT	Pachena	Blackberry	Samsara	REVERB	IOAD	Rifflandia
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>
MDA	2							
MDMA	35	3	17		10	7	1	11
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>4</b>					
MDMA* + Unknown	1		1					
MDMA* + MDA			3					
MDMA* + Ketamine	1							
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>				<b>1</b>
MDA (MDMA Expected)								1
MDMA (MDA Expected)	3			1				
Ketamine			2					
para-Methoxyphenylpiperazine			1					

Cocaine	Otherworld	Pachena	Samsara	REVERB	Rifflandia
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
Cocaine HCl [powder]	19	5	8	1	5
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>	<b>1</b>				<b>1</b>
Cocaine HCl [powder]* + Levamisole					1
Cocaine HCl [powder]* + Benzocaine	1				

Dissociatives	Otherworld	Pachena	Samsara	REVERB	IOAD	Rifflandia
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
Ketamine	21	3	8	1	1	3

Psychedelics	Otherworld	Pachena
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
2C-B	4	1
LSD [acid]	1	
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>2C-B* + Unknown</b>		<b>1</b>

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Down	IWD	REVERB	IOAD
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	2		3
Fentanyl	2		3
<b>Expected* + Unexpected Active(s)</b>		1	
Fentanyl* + Bromazolam		1	
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	1		1
Cocaine Base [crack, rock, hard]	1		
Fentanyl or analogue	1		
Fluorofentanyl Base			1

Other	Otherworld	Samsara	Rifflandia
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	4	3	1
3-MMC [Metaphedrone]	2	1	
4-MMC [Mephedrone]		1	
GHB	1	1	1
Tramadol	1		
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>			1
MDMA			1

Benzodiazepines	Otherworld
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	
Benzodiazepine (unknown type)	1

Methamphetamine	IOAD
<b>Expected Active Only</b>	1
Methamphetamine	1

Unknown	Otherworld	Pachena	Samsara	Rifflandia
<b>Unexpected Active(s) Only</b>	13	3	11	4
3-MMC [Metaphedrone]		1		
Benzocaine				1
Cocaine HCl [powder]	4		2	1
Ketamine	5		5	1
MDA			2	
MDMA	5	2	2	2
<b>Unknown Composition</b>	2			
Unknown	2			

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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 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: Phillips Backyard, Kindle Arts Society & the Otherworld Harm Reduction Team, Mt. Eliah, Cumberland Village Works, QomQem, Island Live Concerts, Wildlife Division, and Rifflandia. We hope to continue offering festival and event-based drug checking services on Vancouver Island.

Substance Drug Checking is based out of the University of Victoria and operates community-wide drug checking services within Campbell River, the Comox Valley, Duncan, Port Alberni, Port Hardy, and 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. We have partnered with Dr. Chris Gill and the team at Vancouver Island University to improve detection and reporting using their methods for the paper spray - mass spectrometer.

*Our project works on Indigenous land. We provide drug checking, harm reduction education and support across many territories on what is colonially known as 'Vancouver Island.' We also act as a resource for these services across the province colonially known as 'British Columbia.' We honour and offer respect to many nations for their stewardship, care and leadership on these lands.*

*Our project originated on the territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən speaking peoples, including the Songhees and Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) Nations, and the WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) Nations on whose land the University of Victoria is located. Some of the territories we are honoured to work across specifically include: Halalt, Lyackson, Meluxlh (Malahat), Punelux-utth', Quw'utsun, Stz-uminus, and Ts'uubaa-asatx; Hupačasath and Tseshaht; K'ómoks; and Laich-kwil-tach.*

*We acknowledge the inextricable links between research, colonization and racism against Indigenous peoples, which continue to this date. Ending the violence faced by people who use drugs cannot be achieved without actively working on decolonization.*

## We gratefully acknowledge our partners on this project

### Our Partners



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

Substance Drug Checking: Event and Festival Report 2024. Victoria, BC: Substance Drug Checking; 2024.