DRUG CHECKING

A HARM REDUCTION SERVICE

WGDS
WELLINGTON GUELPH DRUG STRATEGY

WHAT IS DRUG CHECKING?

Drug checking is a tool that informs people who use unregulated substances about what is in their drugs, allowing them to make educated decisions about their consumption.

DRUG CHECKING TECHNOLOGIES

Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) Spectrometer

- ✓ Portable, fast, can identify many drugs, tests the entire sample
- ✗ Costly, requires a skilled technician, shows only the presence or absence of a drug (not quantities)

Test Strips

- ✓ Affordable, quick, and easy to use
- ✗ May not accurately detect the presence of all drugs, potential liability issues, sample tested may not be returned to client

Mass Spectrometer

- ✓ Precisely quantifies all contents (i.e., drugs, filler, and contaminants)
- ✗ Long wait times for results, costly, requires a skilled technician, sample tested may not be returned to client

BENEFITS OF DRUG CHECKING

Outreach

- Gives service providers the opportunity to share harm reduction information with people who use drugs

Monitoring

- Public health practitioners can detect and report dangerous contaminants to a wide audience, i.e., through alerts, online information, and so on

↑ Knowledge

- About 40% of clients express an intent to decrease their dose after drug checking, which changes consumption patterns

↑ Connections

- Positive relationships with staff helps boost client referrals to other services and supports, like naloxone training and withdrawal therapies

Supply Change

- Research shows that drug checking influences the unregulated market, with supply chains matching client expectations more closely over time

ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

Misconceptions

- Studies have proven that there is no connection between drug checking and increased use of illicit substances

Logistic Issues

- Government exemptions are required for drug checking services
- Long wait times and limited availability of services pose barriers to clients

Legal Factors

- Partnerships with local law enforcement are essential
- Transport and disposal of drugs require careful consideration

Accuracy

- The accuracy of drug checking technologies is varied
- Accurate tests do not fully eliminate harms

Usage Patterns

- People who use alone may not access drug checking services
- Clients may not test because they feel confident in the content of their drugs

STATUS OF DRUG CHECKING IN GUELPH

- **Currently, Guelph does NOT have a drug checking program**
  - We need this service to help reduce opioid-related overdose deaths, which have more than **doubled** from 2019-2020*

- **Goals for local drug checking:**
  - **Short-term**: Participating in a drug checking pilot study and establishing a wraparound program with a safe supply
  - **Long-term**: Having a mobile FTIR spectrometer and confirmatory testing using lab-based mass spectrometry, with transport via a medical courier
- **What can you do to help bring drug checking to Guelph?**
  - Be an advocate!
    - Share your knowledge about drug checking with family and friends
    - Show compassion and respect to people who use substances
    - Further educate yourself and others using the resources below
  - If you are a researcher and would like to support a drug checking pilot study, please visit the WGDS website

RESOURCES

Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy
- http://wgdrugstrategy.ca

Toronto's drug checking service, coordinated by the Center on Drug Policy and Evaluation
- https://drugchecking.cdpe.org

Health Canada

Drug Checking Technology Challenge
- https://impact.canada.ca/en/challenges/drug-checking-challenge

GET YOUR DRUGS TESTED FAST, SAFE, ANONYMOUSLY

Canada's only nationwide mail-in drug checking program
- https://getyourdrugstested.com

*Mortality data as of August,2020

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