

Drug Checking



Helping people understand what their drugs contain may help them make decisions that reduce the risk of harm. Drugs from the unregulated supply often contain unexpected added substances and unpredictable dosages that can result in different effects than an individual may expect, including overdose. Get to know the facts about drug checking.

What Is Drug Checking?

Drug checking is a service that tests drugs from the unregulated supply for content and dosage. It mainly allows people who already use drugs to test their own substances and to make informed choices about how, when and where to consume them.

Drug checking results also help clinicians and other service providers tailor their care and better respond to overdoses. It also provides valuable information on current drug trends to the community at large. Drug checking has existed for more than 50 years globally, and there are about 30 drug checking services in Canada today.

How Does Drug Checking Help People?

Drug checking helps people reduce the risk they face when they use drugs. Knowing what is in a drug can empower people who use drugs to take extra precautions to reduce any potential harms associated with consuming their drugs, including overdose. For example, people who use drug checking services are more likely to change their drug use, such as using less or not using at all, discard drugs, change sources or engage in other harm reduction practices, such as visiting a supervised consumption site.

In the event of an adverse reaction, drug checking results can also inform decisions about the health care a person should receive.

Drug checking services are critical for connecting people with other healthcare services, including primary healthcare, testing for infections like HIV and hepatitis, mental healthcare, and social services and supports like food, shelter, legal aid, employment assistance and housing.

How Does Drug Checking Help Communities?

Drug checking services reduce the number of overdoses and other drug-related harms, easing some of the demand on emergency services, emergency departments and hospitals.

Drug checking helps communities monitor drug-related trends. This means that public health and safety interventions can react in real time and rapidly disseminate information, adjust the response to overdose, improve programs for people who use drugs, and assess and plan for future demand for services and supports.



This document is part of a series of [evidence briefs](#) created by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction to help people and communities understand and contextualize complex health solutions and the resources intended to address people’s substance use health and wellness. Other topics in this series: [opioid agonist therapy \(OAT\)](#) and [supervised consumption sites](#).