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Drug Checking Symposium, Montreal February 24–25, 2025

Summary Report

April 2025

Project Partner



Canadian Centre
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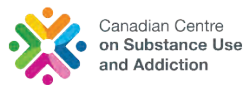


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We further respectfully acknowledge that the land on which we gathered for this symposium — Tio'tià:ke in Kanien'kéha, "Mooniyang" in Anishinaabemowin, and "Montreal" in colonial language — is in the traditional, unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:kas, the Wendats, the Abenakis and the Anishinaabeg, and we acknowledge its history and culture as keepers of this land. Each of the regions from which we gathered are home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have had the opportunity to be present on these lands.

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in saving lives and nurturing communities. We are incredibly fortunate to have such a supportive and dedicated drug checking community across Canada.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.



Executive Summary

Drug checking is a community-based harm reduction service that identifies the content of substances from the unregulated market. It reduces harms by giving people who use drugs (PWUD) greater control over their substance use. It also assists service providers and policy makers by uncovering trends in the unregulated drug supply.

The [National Drug Checking Working Group \(NDCWG\)](#) hosted the national portion of the Drug Checking Symposium in February 2025. Over 140 individuals registered to attend in person or virtually from across Canada, including drug checking technicians, public health specialists, policy makers, and people with lived and living experience of substance use.

The objectives were:

- To enable learning and knowledge exchange among people interested in drug checking across Canada;
- To exchange and disseminate tools and resources from across the country;
- To create opportunities for networking and connections;
- To advance transformation of the NDCWG into a community of practice.

This report summarizes keynotes, panels and breakout discussions, which covered a wide range of topics including technology, data sharing, burnout prevention, legal frameworks and cross-jurisdictional collaboration. Sessions consistently emphasized the importance of peer-led models, the need for consistent funding and coordinated data systems, and the critical role of trust and cultural safety in service delivery.

Next steps include:

- **Strengthen coordination:** Strengthen community of practice by developing governance structures, shared training tools and collective advocacy strategies.
- **Invest in sustainability:** Identify funding opportunities, build capacity and create models that support staff well-being and retention.
- **Deepen community engagement:** Expand efforts to involve PWUD, First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, and other historically excluded voices in service development and leadership.
- **Advance national data harmonization:** Build shared systems while centering equity.
- **Advocate for change:** Leverage shared knowledge to influence public discourse and advise on legal and regulatory policies.



The toxic drug crisis continues to demand bold, coordinated and compassionate action. This symposium affirmed that drug checking is not only a lifesaving intervention, but also a vital component of Canada's public health infrastructure.

Background

About Drug Checking

Drug checking is a service that tests drugs from the unregulated supply for their contents. This is important because drugs from the unregulated supply often contain unexpected added substances that PWUD do not know are there or do not intend to use. Even expected substances can be present in unknown amounts, resulting in different effects than what the individual was anticipating, including overdose. In Canada, drug checking services are most often provided by community-based organizations.

Drug checking can take different forms — from Tier 1 technologies such as test strips that check for presence of an unwanted substance in a sample, to Tier 2 technologies such as FTIR (Fourier-transform infrared) that can confirm the identity of major components in a sample, to Tier 3 technologies that are highly sensitive laboratory equipment and can provide quantitative breakdowns of samples (refer to the [DRED manual, chapter 3](#) for more information on the tier system).

Drug checking provides critical information on the contents found within drug samples. This information can help PWUD make informed decisions.

Drug checking results can also help clinicians and other service providers tailor their care for PWUD and provide valuable information on current drug trends to the community at large.

For more information, refer to [CCSA's evidence brief on drug checking](#) and the [DRED manual](#).

About the National Drug Checking Working Group

The [NDCWG](#) originated in June 2015 after CCSA hosted a meeting on preventing drug- and alcohol-related harms at music festivals in Canada. An important recommendation from that meeting was to further explore drug checking. Following the meeting, people offering or interested in offering drug checking services began to meet informally, and after a time, the government of British Columbia took on a secretariat role in organizing the group.

In September 2017, CCSA was asked by the group to take on the secretariat function given its role as a national convener and its history with the project. In 2022, CCSA partnered with the [DRED Project](#) to jointly chair the NDCWG. Members of the DRED Project had been part of



the inception and evolution of the NDCWG, and as co-chairs now provide insights and guidance on how the NDCWG can best serve the PWUD's needs.

Since its beginnings as a working group, the NDCWG has evolved into a vibrant community of practice, serving important knowledge exchange and capacity-building functions among existing and emerging services. In March 2025, the group had 62 active members (of over 245 who have participated over the years) from eight provinces and territories, representing a variety of sectors, including community-based organizations (e.g., community health centres, client-facing services), system impact organizations (e.g., policy, advocacy, knowledge translation), public health units or authorities, provincial/territorial government, federal government, technology/lab analysis, and research/academia.

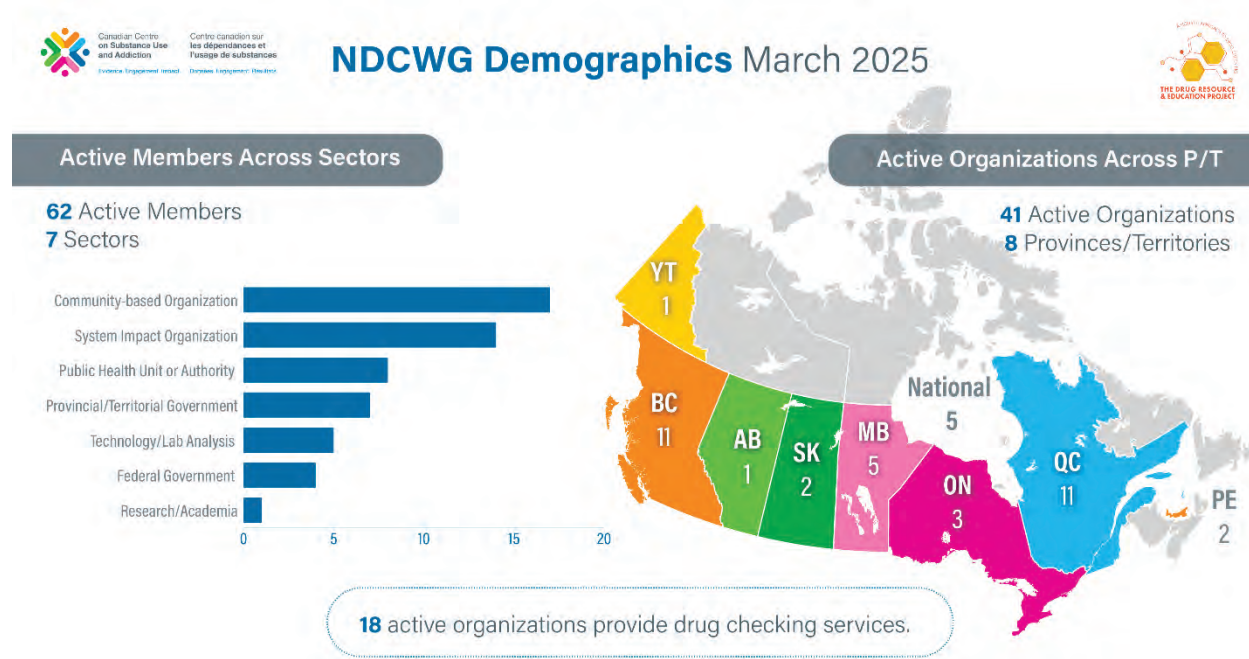


Figure 1. Demographic composition of the NDCWG at the time of the symposium.

About the Symposium

Following successful and productive in-person meetings in 2017 (Harm Reduction International Conference), 2018 (Stimulus Conference) and 2019 (Issues of Substance Conference, in collaboration with the Canadian Research Institute on Substance Misuse Quebec–Atlantic Node), and a pause due to the pandemic, the NDCWG membership resumed meeting in person in 2023.

At the same time, the British Columbia Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) Drug Checking team was planning their annual provincial meeting. Therefore, the two groups decided to organize a [joint event in October 2023](#). This event brought together 93 attendees from



across Canada to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and collaboratively address key challenges in the field. The opportunity to engage in person and build community fostered momentum toward a more cohesive, sustainable and coordinated approach to drug checking.

Given the success of that first joint symposium, and results of a [Drug Checking Environmental Scan](#) led by CCSA that identified numerous gaps, opportunities, and needed conversations, the two teams (NDCWG and BCCSU) decided to organize a second joint symposium in February 2025. Held during the same week, the NDCWG hosted Days 1 and 2 in Quebec, while BCCSU hosted Days 3 and 4 in British Columbia. Days 1 and 2 had a national scope, while Days 3 and 4 focused on the British Columbia context. The events were available virtually for wider participation. This report describes Days 1 and 2 of the second joint symposium.

The objectives of the national portion of the symposium were:

- To enable learning and knowledge exchange among people interested in drug checking across Canada;
- To exchange and disseminate tools and resources from across the country;
- To create opportunities for networking and connections;
- To advance transformation of the NDCWG into a community of practice.

Meeting Registration

A total of 81 individuals representing 38 organizations from across six provinces registered to attend the event in person. The most common self-identified groups among registrants were drug checking technicians, harm reduction workers, people with lived and living experience of substance use, and/or project/program managers.

In addition, 62 individuals representing 36 organizations from across six provinces and two individuals from the United States registered to participate virtually. The most common self-identified groups among registrants were drug checking technicians, harm reduction workers, public health specialists and/or people with lived and living experience of substance use.



In-person Symposium Registrations — Participant Profiles and Locations

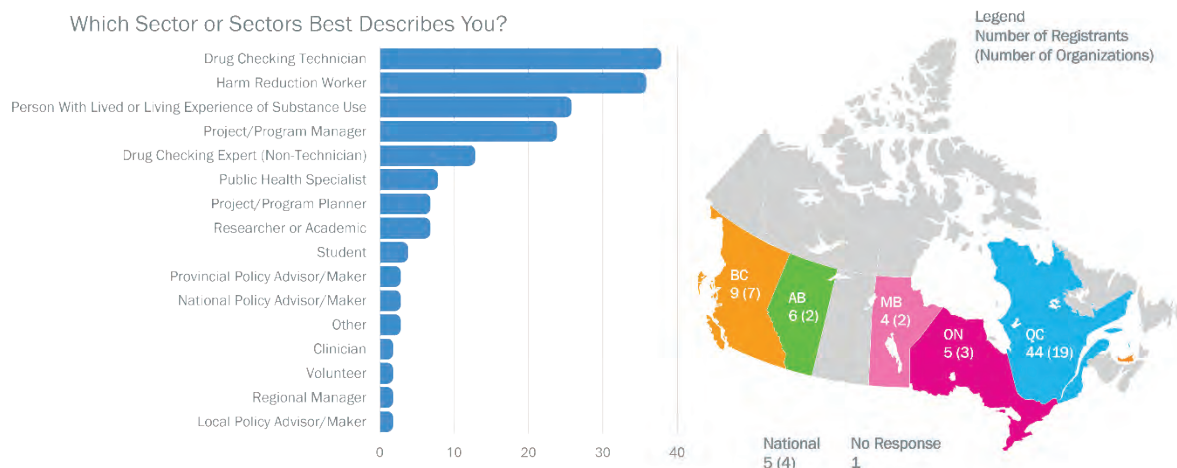


Figure 2. Demographic composition of registrants attending the symposium in-person.

Virtual Symposium Registrations — Participant Profiles and Locations

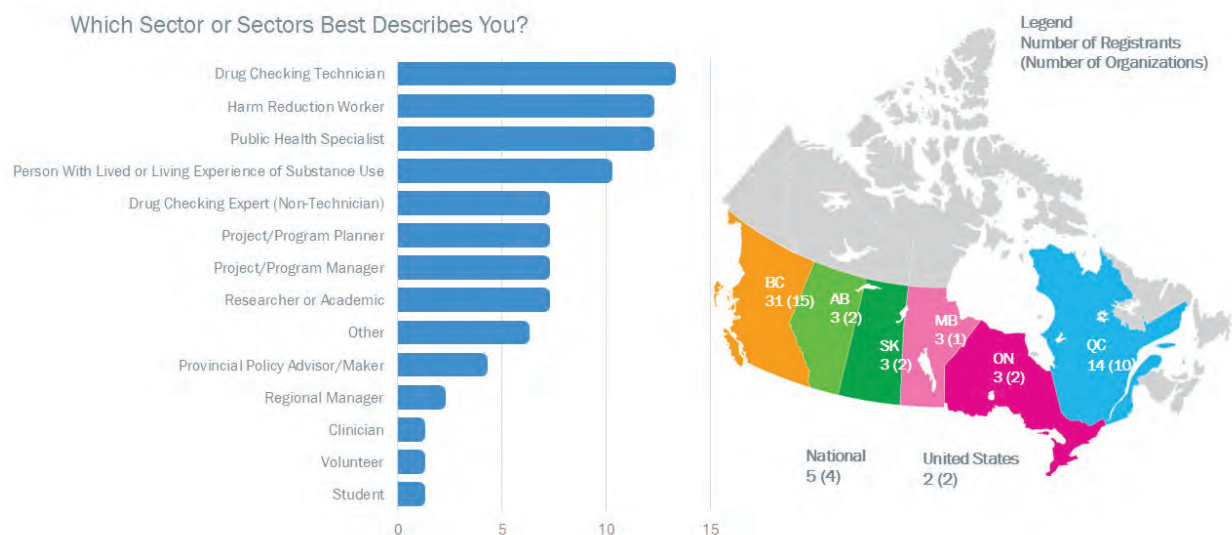


Figure 3. Demographic composition of registrants attending the symposium virtually.



The symposium opened with warm welcomes from the co-chairs of the NDCWG and a land acknowledgement offered by Ali McMullin, who expressed gratitude for the group's ability to gather on the land of the Kanien'kehá:ka, the Wendats, the Abenakis and the Anishinaabeg and create a safe space to fight stigma and practice collective care together.

Dr. Alexander Caudarella, CEO of CCSA, then welcomed attendees on behalf of CCSA, highlighting the importance of knowledge sharing and collaboration and the role of drug checking in guiding responses to the toxic drug crisis. Jarred Aasen also led a collective moment of appreciation for Chloe Sage's (Harm Reduction Coordinator Kootenay/Boundary, Interior Health Authority, and member of DRED and co-chair of the NDCWG) contributions to the field.



Image 1: Jarred Aasen, Doris Payer, Julie-Soleil and Ali McMullin (left to right). Photo credit to Maiah Capel.

Keynote: *On the Road of Overdoses: A Pan-Canadian Portrait*

Speaker: André-Anne Parent, Université de Montréal

André-Anne Parent spoke on the complexity of the overdose crisis, challenging simplified narratives that reduce it to crime, mental health or houselessness. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's social justice framework, she highlighted how stigma manifests in public, media



and policy spaces. Based on fieldwork across four provinces and 11 cities, she documented rising stimulant and inhalant use, increased social isolation and gaps in harm reduction efforts that often overlook non-injection drug use. She identified eight intervention models offering 34 activities, emphasizing the need for structural change, resource distribution and meaningful engagement with people with lived experience.

Project Spotlight: *Overdose Prevention on Stolo Coast Salish Territory*

Speaker: Tanis Rose Oldenburger, Mountainside Harm Reduction Society

Tanis Rose Oldenburger shared her journey in founding [Mountainside Harm Reduction Society](#), a peer-led nonprofit providing mobile FTIR drug checking across the Fraser Salish region of British Columbia. She described Mountainside's unique satellite/mobile model and the unparalleled autonomy it allows them in serving their vast and semi-rural catchment area. She also emphasized the need for safe spaces and highlighted the power of peer-led initiatives, showing how trusted relationships help improve safety.

Panel: *From Samples to Signals: The Public Health Value of Drug Checking Data*

Speakers: Karen McDonald, Toronto's Drug Checking Service and Ontario's Drug Checking Community; Jen Angelucci, BCCSU; Colin Steensma, Health Canada

Moderator: Doris Payer, CCSA

Doris Payer led a session exploring how the role of drug checking data extends beyond informing PWUD to shaping public health responses.

Karen McDonald discussed how [Toronto's Drug Checking Service](#) shares real-time data with clients, public health units and the broader public through reports, interactive data visualizations, newsletters, social media, community postings and alerts, and shared statements from policymakers, forensic laboratories, healthcare providers and law enforcement about how their data had been useful.

Jen Angelucci provided insights into British Columbia's [centralized drug checking database](#) and its role in guiding provincial health responses through use by researchers, public health decision makers, the media, clinicians and the general public.

Colin Steensma provided a national perspective on monitoring emerging substances and communicating results through the [Canadian Drug and Substance Watch](#), which is used by government departments and agencies, international partners, research institutions, public health service providers, and law enforcement and border officials.

The session emphasized the value of drug checking in shaping broader health strategies, setting the stage for discussion of concrete steps toward this goal on Day 2 of the symposium.

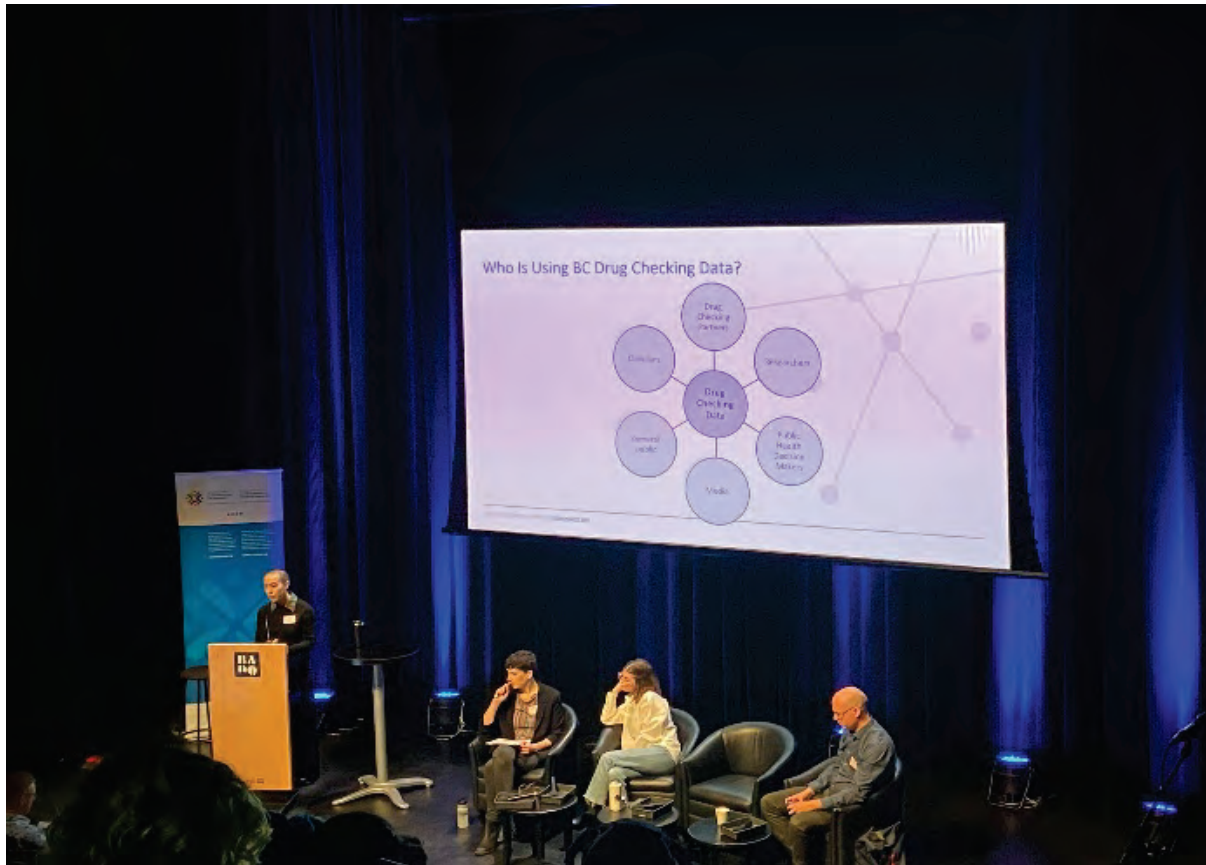


Image 2: Jen Angelucci provides insight into who is using BC drug checking data. Photo credit to Jarred Aasen.

Project Spotlight: Informed Choices, Safer Communities: Spectrum Drug Checking in Alberta

Speakers: Kayla Halliday and Douglas Rusk, Spectrum Drug Testing, Queer and Trans Health Collective

Kayla Halliday and Douglas Rusk presented the grassroots approach taken by the Queer and Trans Health Collective's [Spectrum Drug Testing](#) and their efforts to create equitable access to harm reduction services. They shared key insights from two years of operations, focusing on strategies for managing political challenges, ensuring equitable access for marginalized communities and risks of data sharing, particularly for queer and trans populations. Key takeaways included identifying unexpected allies, streamlining operations and leveraging data for program validation while balancing risk and impact.

Panel: Overview of Substances in Quebec: Regional Variations and Trends

Speakers: Sandrine Belley, Spectre de rue; Jean-Philippe Bergeron, Dopamine; Rose Brisebois, BRAS Outaouais; Méliissa Laporte, CIPTO; Mathilde Robichaud and Samuel



Généreux, Nomade de Oasis Unité Mobile D'Intervention; Marguerite Dufault, Travail de rue de Chicoutimi

Moderator: Justine Bizier, Spectre de rue

Representatives from six drug checking organizations across the province of Quebec ([Spectre de rue](#), [Dopamine](#), [BRAS Outaouais](#), [CIPTO](#), [Nomade](#) and [Travail de rue de Chicoutimi](#)) shared insights on substance trends and service use in Montreal, Laval, Outaouais and Chicoutimi. Each speaker shared key programs and features of their service and presented recent drug checking results from that service. The session highlighted key regional patterns, including a rise in stimulant use, consistent methamphetamine presence, and evolving trends in fentanyl adulteration and counterfeit pharmaceuticals.



Image 3: Mélissa Laporte speaks about the services offered by CIPTO and shares findings from recent drug checking efforts. Photo credit to Élise Étienne.

Project Spotlight: *Building Drug Checking Systems in Ontario*

Speakers: Karen McDonald and Hayley Thompson, Toronto's Drug Checking Service and Ontario's Drug Checking Community

Karen McDonald and Hayley Thompson described their expansion from [Toronto's Drug Checking Service](#) into a province-wide network. They highlighted challenges, including a lack



of sustained funding and policy uncertainties that could lead to the closure of collection sites and reduction in sample volumes. They then detailed significant work they have done to create resources and tools that not only led to their service's success but can also be adapted in other jurisdictions. They also discussed future work to ensure reliable and accurate reporting of drug checking results.

Panel: A Tiered Approach: An Introduction to the Three Tiers of Technology

Speakers: Jen Angelucci, BCCSU; Lea Gozdziński, University of Victoria, Substance Drug Checking; Stéphanie Lessard, Health Canada Drug Analysis Service

Moderator: Jarred Aasen, DRED Project

Jarred Aasen led an overview of drug checking technologies, categorized into three tiers based on their capabilities and precision.

Tier 1, presented by Jen Angelucci, focused on test strips as a low-cost, accessible method for detecting fentanyl, benzodiazepines and emerging substances like xylazine, highlighting sensitivity, specificity and limitations.

Tier 2, led by Lea Gozdziński, introduced a FTIR spectral analysis platform designed specifically for community-based drug checking, emphasizing automation, customization and long-term sustainability.

Tier 3, presented by Stéphanie Lessard, covered confirmatory testing using qNMR, a highly precise method for identifying and quantifying complex drug mixtures. The session underscored the importance of accuracy, sustainability and technological advancements in drug checking while addressing challenges such as calibration, software limitations and the need for standardized protocols.

A concluding discussion introduced early-stage efforts by the Canadian Drug Agency in partnership with CCSA to evaluate drug checking technologies through a health technology assessment.

Presentation: When We Know Better, Then We Do Better: How to Engage Research Between Universities and Community Organizations

Speakers: Lauren Airth, University of Victoria, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research; Ella Newman, University of Victoria, Substance Drug Checking; Melissa Feddersen, University of British Columbia

This session explored the role of universities in drug checking and harm reduction, highlighting opportunities for meaningful engagement with communities. The team of speakers shared perspectives from researchers (Lauren Airth), students (Ella Newman) and decision makers (Melissa Feddersen), emphasizing the benefits of collaboration: Students



gain real-world experience, communities build trust in science, and universities contribute research and resources.

Themes included breaking down stigma, ensuring equitable compensation and clarifying sector roles to strengthen partnerships. The session also emphasized the need for relationship building, shared responsibility and ensuring that all parties benefit.

Project Spotlight: *Rural/Remote Drug Checking in Indigenous Communities: Building Relationships and Community Partnerships*

Speaker: Courtney Harrop, ʔaj̓im̓et Harm Reduction, Tla'amin Nation

Courtney Harrop described the expansion of ʔaj̓im̓et Harm Reduction, Tla'amin Nation's harm reduction service that includes drug checking, since the last symposium. Since then, they have secured their own FTIR machine, extended services from two days a week to full time and reduced logistical challenges.

Courtney emphasized the importance of trust, cultural safety and peer-led approaches in small communities where stigma and anonymity concerns are significant. Meaningful partnerships with PWUD, Indigenous governments and Elders also ensured community ownership and integration of traditional healing practices. However, funding remains precarious, and the shifting political landscape threatens harm reduction efforts. The session underscored the need for sustained investment and the centering of Indigenous voices in harm reduction policies and services.

Day 1 Social Gathering

Attendees were invited to a social event after Day 1 wrapped up as an opportunity to unwind, connect with other people and continue conversations in a more informal setting. The gathering reflected the event's intentional focus on creating space for meaningful engagement beyond formal sessions.

Day 2

Symposium Snapshots & Surprises: *Sharing Highlights and Inspirations*

Moderator: Julie-Soleil Meeson, DRED Project, AIDQ

To welcome participants back on Day 2, attendees were invited to share personal highlights and unexpected moments from Day 1. Comments emphasized the value of connection and mutual support within the drug checking community, and the motivation that comes from learning about established programs operating at greater scale. Many noted how affirming it felt to realize they are not alone in this work, with the symposium offering a rare opportunity to build relationships, break out of silos and strengthen community across jurisdictions.

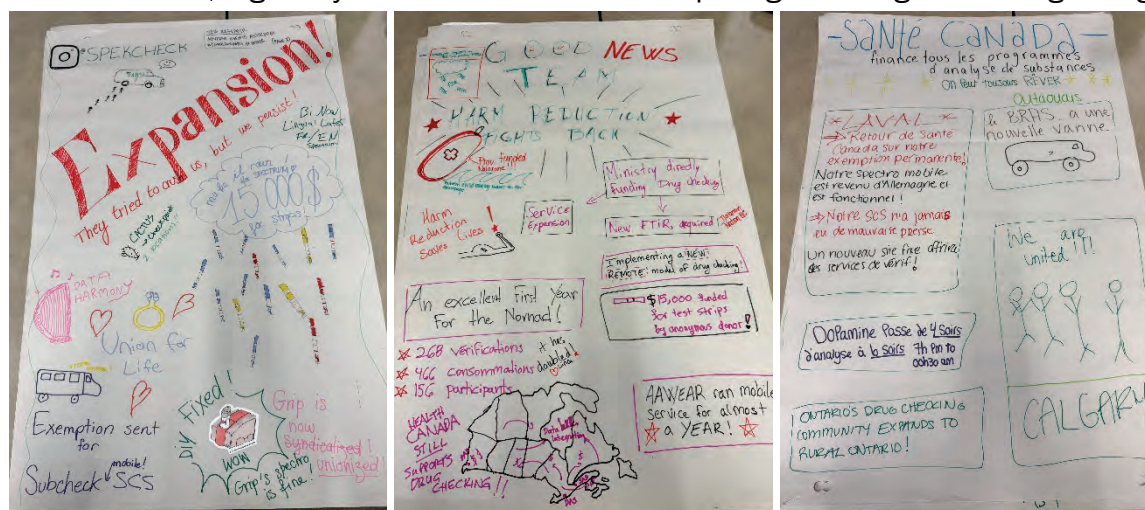


Interactive Exercise: Newspaper Exercise (Part 2) — Let's Focus on the Good News!

Facilitator: Julie-Soleil Meeson, DRED Project, AIDQ

Attendees celebrated drug checking successes and innovations through creation of a “newspaper front page.” This session split attendees into six groups with members chosen at random to facilitate connection with new colleagues and foster deeper national collaboration.

Newspaper headlines highlighted creative responses to limited funding and staffing, like expanding mobile services, forming new partnerships, and building trust with First Nations. Achievements ranged from new exemptions and funding wins, to provincial naloxone programs, mobile units doubling in reach and new unionized teams fixing their own FTIR machines. From grassroots triumphs to broader systems change, participants showcased their resilience, ingenuity and determination to keep drug checking alive and growing.



Images 4-6: Examples of newspaper front pages created during the exercise. Photo credit to Nina Salazar.

Presentation: Do You See 2C-B Too?

Speaker: Antoine Marcheterre, Interior Health Authority

Antoine Marcheterre used 2C-B (a synthetic psychedelic drug) as a lens to explore drug checking, harm reduction chemistry and the evolving presence of research chemicals in the unregulated drug supply. He traced the history of 2C-B, noting its rising popularity in festival settings and growing share of psychedelic-related samples in British Columbia, surpassing even MDMA at some events.

The presentation emphasized 2C-B's dose sensitivity, unpredictable combinations, and physical and psychological effects, underscoring the importance of accurate measurement and harm reduction messaging. It also addressed the complexities of analogues, molecular naming, and unexpected substances. Grounded in real-world FTIR data, the session



encouraged critical thinking about the need to continuously adapt harm reduction efforts to a shifting and often poorly understood drug landscape.



Image 7: Antoine Marcheterre presents on 2C-B. Photo credit to Nina Salazar.

Consultation: *Connecting the Dots: Strategies for Harmonizing Drug Checking Data*

Speakers: Doris Payer, CCSA; Colin Steensma, Health Canada; Jen Angelucci, BCCSU

Doris Payer led an interactive session to consult with participants on a proposal for a national project to harmonize drug checking data. After revisiting the value of drug checking data in shaping public health strategies, as discussed on Day 1, the session explored the benefits and challenges of aligning data reporting across jurisdictions.

Jen Angelucci shared lessons from similar work harmonizing data across British Columbia, emphasizing the importance of clear principles, strong partnerships and time.

Colin Steensma offered insights into Health Canada's efforts to harmonize data from services that report to them. Participants raised critical questions about equity, data privacy



and sovereignty, and the need for practical tools that reduce reporting burden while improving consistency.

Overall, the group expressed support for moving forward and a need to co-ordinate before data fragmentation deepens.

Interactive Exercise: Drug Checking Action Lab: Crafting the Future Together

Facilitator: Julie-Soleil Meeson, DRED Project, AIDQ

Topic-specific Facilitators: Antoine Marcheterre (Continuing Education about Drugs); Doris Payer (Data Sharing); Hayley Thompson (Sustainability and Future Directions); Jarred Aasen (Technology); Karen McDonald (Political, Legal, and Regulatory Frameworks); Roxanne Hallal (Training); Tanis Oldenburger (Community Engagement)

This session continued the strategic exercise from the previous symposium to collaboratively transform the NDCWG into an active community of practice (CoP).

Julie-Soleil Meeson provided updates on the advisory committee's efforts since the last symposium to improve governance, structure and consensus building.

Attendees then participated in an exercise focused on the seven core areas identified at the last symposium: Data sharing, training, continuing education, sustainability, community engagement, legal frameworks and technology. Rotating groups refined the definition and scope of each core area and identified actionable strategies that could be taken forward by a CoP.

Ideas reported back at the end included: Creating a harmonized data dictionary, developing a training toolkit and recorded spectra exercises, launching webinars for ongoing education, collective letter-writing campaigns, funding advocacy and stronger relationships with technology developers.

Emphasizing mutual support and real-world application, the session marked an important step toward a more unified, informed and impactful drug checking movement in Canada.

Presentation: Strategies and Innovations to Prevent Burnout and Trauma in the Context of the Toxic Drug Supply

Speaker: Ali McMullin, Sub Check, PACT de rue

Ali McMullin led a discussion on practical and organizational strategies to prevent burnout and secondary trauma among drug checking workers.

Emphasizing the need to move beyond individual resilience, the session focused on work culture, infrastructure, scheduling and human resources policies that center worker well-being. The session identified risk factors, such as guilt-based attendance pressures, inconsistent schedules, high administrative demands, and inadequate contingency planning and brainstormed protective strategies like clear role definitions, peer support, regular



mental health check-ins and staff autonomy. Innovative ideas included tiered vacation policies, flex-time systems, supportive training protocols, and building in joy and career development opportunities. The session also underscored the importance of psychological safety, trust and inclusive practices, calling for workplaces that recognize the humanity of both workers and service users.

Presentation: *Defining Drug Checking: Exploring Language and Terminology*

Speakers: Hayley Thompson, Toronto's Drug Checking Service and Ontario's Drug Checking Community (ODCC); David Byres, BCCSU

Hayley Thompson and David Byres compared approaches between their services in defining, describing and communicating their work. They shared differences and overlaps in terminology, reporting models and engagement with service users. The session highlighted varying models of service delivery and different approaches to presenting results, such as categorizing ingredients and tailoring messaging to the client's context. The discussion emphasized the need for consistent, non-alarmist language and the value of standardized yet adaptable frameworks.

Audience members shared insights into their local data practices, underscoring regional differences and the potential benefits of harmonized terminology across jurisdictions.

Closing Remarks

Speakers: Julie-Soleil Meeson, DRED Project, AIDQ; Jarred Aasen, DRED Project; Doris Payer, CCSA.

The symposium wrapped up with thanks from the NDCWG co-chairs, who expressed gratitude for everyone's participation and collaboration.

Comments from the audience included appreciation for the event and how they are eager to bring the information they learned back to their teams. Many attendees also expressed that meeting in person made them feel more comfortable engaging and asking questions during the monthly NDCWG meetings.

The symposium closed with a sense of momentum, connection and excitement for the attendees who were continuing their learning journey in British Columbia.



Image 8: Group photo from Day 1. Photo credits to Élise Étienne.

Post-event Evaluation and Comments

The post-event survey, completed by 34 respondents, showed strong positive impacts. All respondents found the event relevant to their work or needs, with 94% reporting increased knowledge and 82% reporting greater confidence in applying what they learned.

Respondents rated their knowledge higher after the event than before. Nearly all (94%) indicated they would apply the information in their work or life, and 97% said they would share it with colleagues or partners. Many also planned to use the knowledge to influence organizational practices (76%) and policy, programming or research (73.5%). Overall satisfaction with the event was high, especially regarding the presenters (93%) and how relevant the content was to participants' experiences (88%).

While most feedback was positive, some respondents shared concerns about language accessibility, the length of the event and a need for more hands-on learning opportunities.

Suggestions for future events included deeper dives into specific substances, capacity-building (e.g., FTIR training), personal experiences in drug checking and the political context across regions. Respondents also expressed a desire for greater street-entrenched awareness, stronger integration of diversity, equity and inclusion, and more recognition of activists and pioneers in the field.

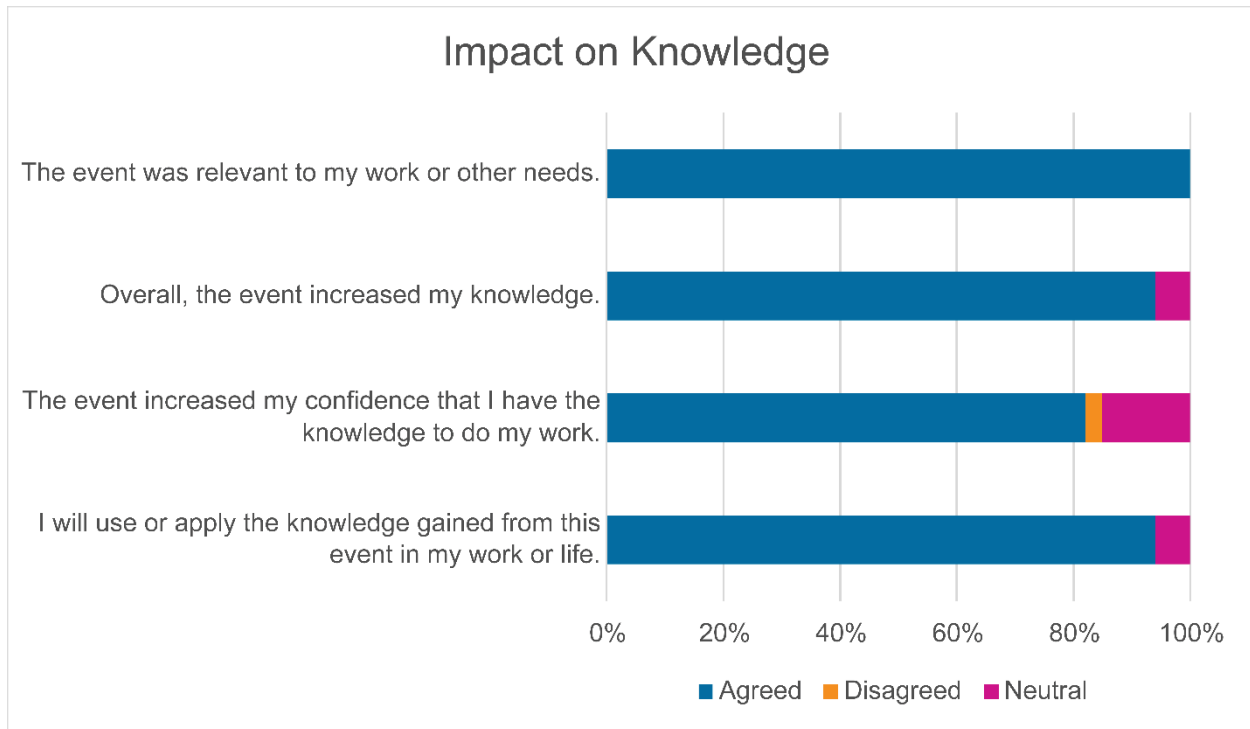


Figure 4. Respondents' agreement with statements about the impact of the event on their knowledge.

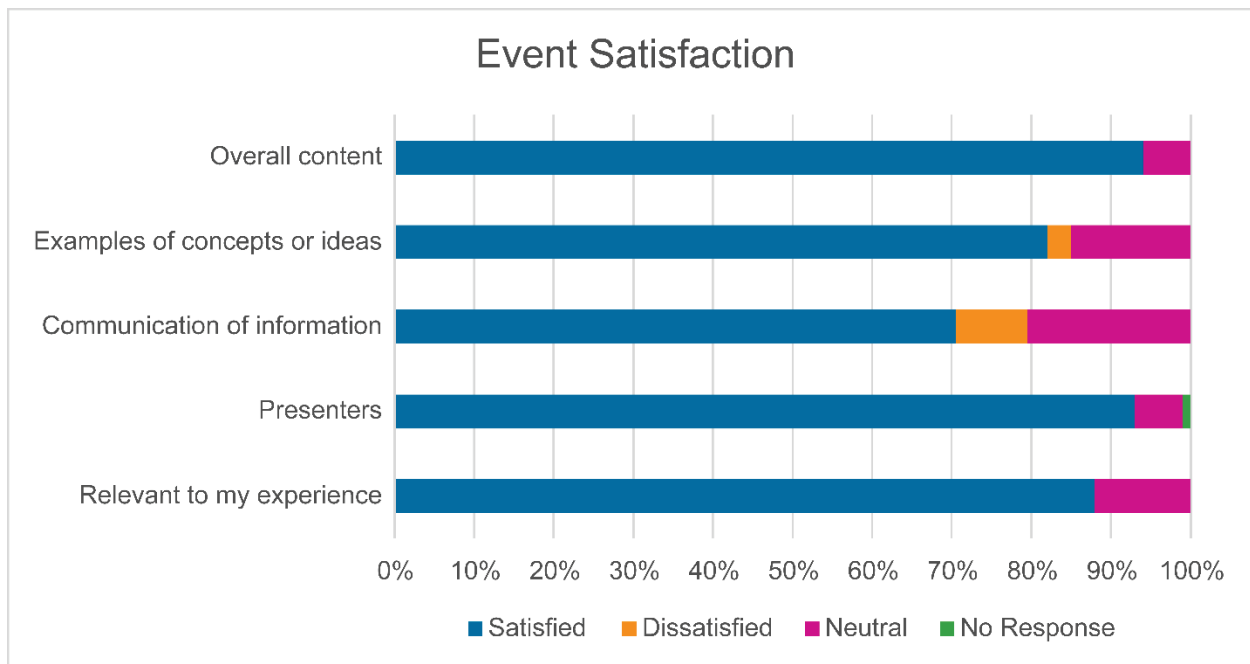


Figure 5. Respondents' satisfaction with elements of the event.



In addition to the post-event survey, a live poll was conducted during the March 2025 NDCWG meeting. A total of 34 attendees participated anonymously, sharing feedback on various aspects of the event. They highlighted their favourite parts such as networking and specific presentations and presenters. Respondents offered suggestions for improvement, like hosting during spring instead of winter and spreading out the timeline. They identified elements they felt should be kept, including translation services. When asked about attending a future event, 21 responded with 17 votes for “absolutely!”, two for “Likely” and two for “Maybe.” Respondents were also invited to describe their experience in a single word. The most common responses were “collaborative,” “inspiring,” “informative” and “refreshing.”

Conclusions and Next Steps

The symposium brought together a vibrant, diverse and deeply committed community of people advancing drug checking across Canada. Over two days of discussions, knowledge exchange and relationship building, participants highlighted not only the complexity of the drug landscape but also the innovation, resilience and care that define this field.

Common themes came up across many of the sessions:

- The urgent need for access and sustainability, and the power of peer- and community-led approaches.
- The potential of collaboration and harmonization to support broader public health goals.
- The importance of centering equity and lived experience in every aspect of the work.

Whether through emerging technologies, evolving policy frameworks, or deeply human conversations about burnout and belonging, this gathering reaffirmed that drug checking is not just a technical service, but a vital, life-affirming practice rooted in trust, dignity and collective care.

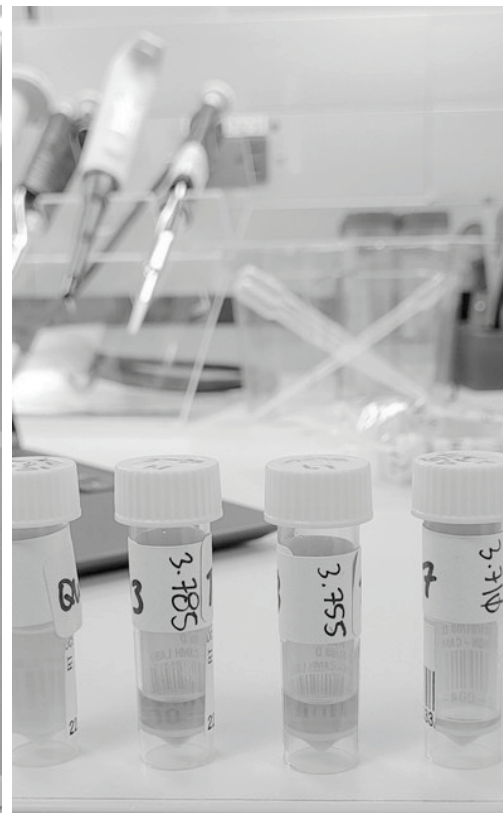
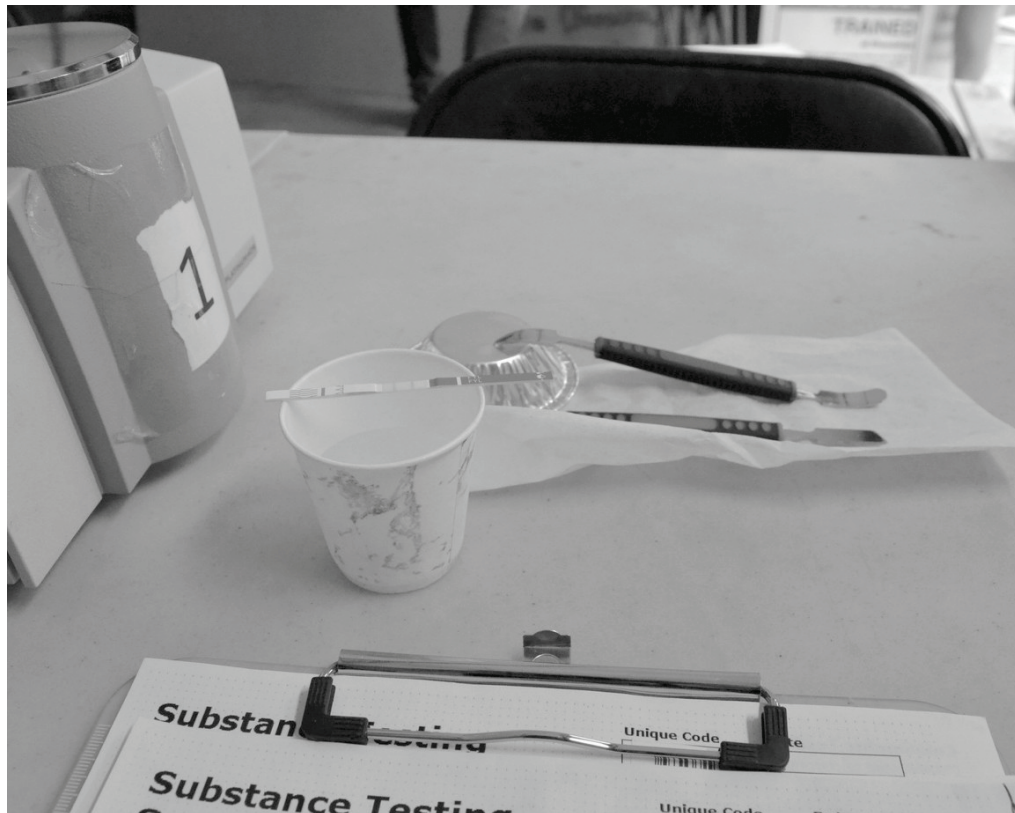
Looking ahead, several priorities emerged:

- **Strengthening coordination:** Continued development of the drug checking community of practice, including governance structures, shared training tools and collective advocacy strategies.
- **Investing in sustainability:** Identifying new funding opportunities, building organizational capacity and developing flexible models that support staff well-being and long-term retention.
- **Deepening community engagement:** Expanding efforts to involve PWUD, First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, and other historically excluded voices in service design, evaluation and leadership.
- **Advancing harmonization:** Building shared frameworks and infrastructure to support meaningful, secure and respectful data sharing across jurisdictions.



- **Advocating for change:** Leveraging shared knowledge to influence public discourse, inform decision makers, and advise on supportive legal and regulatory environments.

This event confirmed that drug checking is not just a technical intervention, but a powerful expression of care, solidarity and community resilience. As we move forward, the ideas shared, relationships built, and commitments made will continue to drive impact long after the symposium ends and help build a more cohesive national movement.



Co-hosts



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DRUG CHECKING SYMPOSIUM

Program - Montreal

February 24 at the Archives
535 avenue Viger Est.

February 25 at the la Grande Bibliothèque de BAñQ
475 boulevard De Maisonneuve Est.

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Welcome & Goals

Welcome to the 2nd Drug Checking Symposium!

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) and the Drug Resource and Education (DRED) Project are thrilled to welcome you to this year's event in Montreal.

This symposium brings together 30 incredible speakers from across Canada, ready to share valuable insights on drug checking. Get ready for inspiring presentations, dynamic panels, interactive workshops, and meaningful discussions—both in person and online.

We've put together an exciting program, and we hope you'll leave with new knowledge, ideas, and connections to bring back to your communities. This is your event— let's make the most of it together!

Goals

- ♦ To enable learning and knowledge exchange among people interested in drug checking across Canada;
- ♦ To exchange and disseminate tools and resources from across the country;
- ♦ To create opportunities for networking and connections;
- ♦ To advance transformation of the National Drug Checking Working Group into a community of practice.

Dates and Locations

February 24

- ♦ **Location:** From 9 AM to 5 PM (Montreal time) at the National Archives in Montreal, located at 535 Viger Avenue East, Montreal, QC, H2L 2P3.
 - **Rooms:** Atrium and Auditorium.
- ♦ **Social event:** From 5:30 PM – at 3 Brasseurs, 1658 Saint-Denis Street, Montreal, Quebec H2X 3K6.
- ♦ **Format:** Hybrid event (in-person and online).
- ♦ **Accessibility:** Simultaneous English-French interpretation available.

February 25

- ♦ **Location:** From 9 AM to 5 PM The Grande Bibliothèque de BAnQ, 475 De Maisonneuve Boulevard East, Montreal, QC, H2L 5C4.
 - **Rooms:** **M-450 and M-465.**
- ♦ **Format:** In-person only.
- ♦ **Accessibility:** Sessions in English only.

Day 1: Schedule February 24

Time	Session
Registration in person Room Atrium & Online via ZOOM	
8 -	Arrival of participants
Auditorium & Online Eastern time	
9 - 9:25 (English & French)	Welcome, Acknowledgements and Introduction Jarred Aasen (he/him), DRED Project and co-chair of the National Drug Checking Working Group (NDCWG) Doris Payer (she/her), Senior Knowledge Broker and co-chair of the NDCWG, CCSA Julie-Soleil Meeson (she/her), Responsable, contenus et valorisation de la pratique, Association des intervenants en dépendance, DRED Project and co-chair of the NDCWG Ali McMullin (he/him), Intervenant psychosocial, Sub Check, Service de vérification des substances de PACT de rue Dr. Alexander Caudarella, Chief Executive Officer, CCSA
9:25-9:55 (French)	Keynote speaker On the Road of Overdoses: A Pan-Canadian Portrait André-Anne Parent (she/her), Université de Montréal, Professeure agrégée The overdose crisis is a complex issue, yet too often, efforts are made to simplify and reduce it to just a few factors: crime, mental health issues, and homelessness. However, a pan-Canadian journey through its many realities and faces, guided by Nancy Fraser's book on social justice and recognition, suggests that embracing this complexity can help foster more inclusive and just communities.
9:55 - 10:15 (English)	Overdose Prevention on Stolo Coast Salish Territory Tanis Rose Oldenburger (she/her), Founder & Executive Director, Mountainside Harm Reduction Society Founder and Executive Director of Mountainside Harm Reduction Society will share parts of her journey which led her to found a non-profit organization. Mountainside provides FTIR point-of-service drug checking utilizing a unique satellite/mobile model. As a peer-led organization Mountainside has unparalleled autonomy to serve the vast and semi-rural Fraser Salish Health Authority Region of BC.
10:15 - 10:45	Break - coffee and snacks

Day 1: Schedule February 24

Times	Session
10:45 - 11:30 (English)	<p>From Samples to Signals: The Public Health Value of Drug Checking Data Moderator: Doris Payer (she/her), Senior Knowledge Broker and co-chair of the NDCWG, CCSA</p> <p>Disseminating and Applying Drug Checking Data Karen McDonald (she/her), Executive Director, Toronto's Drug Checking Service and Ontario's Drug Checking Community</p> <p>Since launching in 2019, Toronto's Drug Checking Service has been committed to returning the data they generate to the communities they serve. This commitment continues as the program scales within Ontario. This presentation will (1) review the program's strategies to disseminate timely and accessible data and (2) describe how various groups outside of the harm reduction community are benefiting from the program's findings, including public health units, policy makers, forensic science and toxicology laboratories, coroners, clinicians, and first responders.</p> <p>The Reach of British Columbia's Drug Checking Data Jen Angelucci (she/her), Drug Checking Research Data Coordinator, British Columbia Centre on Substance Use</p> <p>Answering questions about who is using data collected from drug checking services in BC, how they are using it, and exploring potential impacts.</p> <p>Monitoring of New and Emerging Substances at the National Level Colin Steensma (he/him), Senior Epidemiologist, Office of Drug Research and Surveillance, Health Canada</p> <p>In addition to drug checking, there are a number of sources of data which can inform public health practitioners on the ever-evolving landscape of psychoactive substance use in Canada. The presentation will provide a brief overview of two areas where the Office of Drug Research and Surveillance at Health Canada is working with partners to build this portrait: the Canadian Drug and Substance Watch, as well as monitoring of self-reported drug use in Supervised Consumption Sites.</p>

Day 1: Schedule February 24

Times	Session
11:30-11:50 (English)	<p>Informed Choices, Safer Communities: Spectrum Drug Checking in Alberta</p> <p>Kayla Halliday (she/her), Co-Manager of Harm Reduction and Program Development & Douglas Rusk (he/they), Co-Manager of Harm Reduction and Program Development, Spectrum Drug Testing</p> <p>The Queer and Trans Health Collective will share the grassroots approach they took to generate Alberta's first legal drug checking program, Spectrum, with an emphasis on key takeaways learned from community based research and our focus on creating equitable access to support for marginalized communities. Join us as we share about the Alberta context of harm reduction, survival strategies for antagonistic government, considerations around the risk of sharing data on marginalized populations, and our top 3 insights from the last 2 years of operations that could support any grassroots drug checking effort in Canada!</p>
11:50-1:20	Lunch will be served in the Atrium
1:20 - 2:25 (French)	<p>Overview of Substances in Quebec: Regional Variations and Trends</p> <p>Moderator : Justine Bizier (she/they), Chargée de projet, Spectre de rue, Montréal Sandrine Belley (she/they), Intervenante en vérification de substance, Spectre de rue, Montréal - Jean-Philippe Bergeron (he/him), Analyste-chargé de projet, Dopamine, Montréal, Rose Brisebois (she/her), Intervenante en milieux festifs, BRAS, Outaouais - Mélissa Laporte (she/her), Intervenante en réduction des méfaits, CIPTO - Centre d'intervention et de prévention en toxicomanie de l'Outaouais - Mathilde Robichaud (she/her), Intervenante psychosociale et Samuel Généreux, Nomade de Oasis Unité Mobile D'Intervention, Laval - Marguerite Dufault (she/her), Intervenante au service de vérification de substance, Travail de rue de Chicoutimi, Saguenay</p> <p>This presentation provides an overview of the substances most frequently tested by six drug checking services in Quebec, covering the regions of Montreal, Laval, Outaouais, and Chicoutimi. We will explore local market variations, common substances, and the specific characteristics of each regional service.</p>



Day 1: Schedule February 24

Times	Session
2:25 - 2:50 (English)	<p>Building Drug Checking Systems in Ontario Karen McDonald (she/her), Executive Director, Toronto's Drug Checking Service and Ontario's Drug Checking Community - Hayley Thompson (she/her), Managing Director, Toronto's Drug Checking Service and Ontario's Drug Checking Community</p> <p>Despite incredibly limited provincial support, Toronto's Drug Checking Service has scaled to become Ontario's Drug Checking Community. We've done so by building systems that have grown our program from five members in Toronto in 2019 to over 20 members throughout the province by 2025. During this presentation, we'll describe our program and the significant political and operational barriers we're facing, as well as showcase how we've streamlined exemptions and data collection and management and are supporting the use of several onsite drug checking technologies in our province.</p>
2:50 - 3:20	Break - Coffee and snacks
3:20 - 4:10 (English)	<p>A Tiered Approach: An Introduction to the Three Tiers of Technology Moderator: Jarred Aasen (he/him), DRED Project and co-chair of the NDCWG</p> <p>Tier 1: Test Strip Trials and Tribulations Jen Angelucci (she/her), Drug Checking Research Data Coordinator, British Columbia Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU)</p> <p>Tier 2: An FTIR Spectral Analysis Platform Made for Community-Based Drug Checking Lea Gozdziwski (she/her), Research Associate & DC Technician, University of Victoria & Substance</p> <p>Tier 3: Confirmatory Testing and Quantification of Complex Drug Mixtures by qNMR Stéphanie Lessard (she/her), Acting Manager – Strategic Research and Scientific Development, Drug Analysis Service, Health Canada</p>

Day 1: Schedule February 24

Times	Session
4:10-4:30 (English)	<p>When We Know Better, Then We Do Better: How to Engage Research Between Universities and Community Organizations</p> <p>Dr. Lauren Airth (she/her), Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Victoria/Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research - Ella Newman (she/her), Master's of Science in Chemistry, University of Victoria, Drug Checking Technician at Substance - Melissa Feddersen (she/her), Manager, Campus Wellness and Education, University of British Columbia</p> <p>Sharing the perspective of a university student, decision maker, and researcher on drug checking engagement with the community. Hear about the ways in which communities and universities can better partner together in drug checking service delivery and what that means when it comes to university culture and protecting the interests of community groups.</p>
4:30-4:50 (English)	<p>Rural/Remote Drug Checking in Indigenous Communities: Building Relationships and Community Partnerships</p> <p>Courtney Harrop (she/her), ʔəjɪmɛt Harm Reduction- Tla'amin Nation, Harm Reduction Coordinator and Drug Checking Project lead</p> <p>This presentation will discuss relationship building with PWUD in small communities in relation to drug checking services, and the values of deepening community partnerships.</p>
4:50-5:00 (English)	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <p>Doris Payer (she/her), Senior Knowledge Broker and co-chair of the NDCWG, CCSA</p>
5:30 - 8:00	<p>Social Gathering / 5 à 7</p> <p>□ Les 3 Brasseurs, 1658 rue Saint-Denis, Montréal, Québec H2X 3K6</p> <p>Join us for a casual and friendly social gathering at Les 3 Brasseurs! A great opportunity to relax, connect, and continue discussions in an informal setting.</p> <p>□ Finger food & non-alcoholic drinks will be provided. □ Wine & beer will be available for purchase.</p>

Day 2: Schedule February 25

This part of the conference will be conducted in English. No interpretation is available.

Times	Session	Rooms
8 à 9	Arrival of participants	M-450
9:00 - 9:20	<p>Welcome back!</p> <p>Symposium Snapshots & Surprises: Sharing Highlights and Inspirations</p> <p>Julie-Soleil Meeson (elle/she), Responsable, contenus et valorisation de la pratique, AIDQ, DRED Project and co-chair of the NDCWG</p> <p>Doris Payer (elle/she), Senior Knowledge Broker and co-chair of the NDCWG, CCSA</p> <p>Jarred Aasen (il/he/him), DRED Project and co-chair of the NDCWG</p> <p>Kick off the second day with an engaging session where participants reflect on their personal highlights and unexpected moments from the symposium. This interactive discussion aims to foster connection, celebrate successes, and set a positive tone for the day's events.</p>	M-450
9:20 - 10:30	<p>Poster Presentations – Newspaper Exercise (Part 2) - Let's focus on the good news!</p> <p>Moderator: Julie-Soleil Meeson</p> <p>Who's participating? Everyone!</p> <p>Let's focus on the good news! Participatory activity for all to share and learn about what people are working on in drug checking across Canada.</p>	M-450
10:30 - 11:00	Break - coffee and snacks	

Day 2: Schedule February 25

This part of the conference will be conducted in English. No interpretation is available.

Times	Session	Rooms
11 - 12	<p>Do you see 2C-B too?</p> <p>Antoine Marcheterre (il), Responsable des Services d'Analyse de Substances, Interior Health BC</p> <p>The intention is to use 2C-B as a container for learning about drugs, drug checking and harm reduction by looking at its history, prevalence, and chemistry. We will discuss topics such as research chemicals, Tusi, molecular nomenclature, spectral differences and more. There will be a question period.</p>	M-450
11 - 12	<p>Connecting the Dots: Strategies for Harmonizing Drug Checking Data</p> <p>Moderator: Doris Payer, Senior Knowledge Broker and co-chair of the NDCWG, CCSA (moderator), Colin Steensma (he/him), Senior Epidemiologist, Office of Drug Research and Surveillance, Health Canada, Jen Angelucci (she/her), Drug Checking Research Data Coordinator, British Columbia Centre on Substance Use</p> <p>Interactive consultation</p>	M-465
12 - 1:30	Lunch	M-450

Day 2: Schedule February 25

This part of the conference will be conducted in English. No interpretation is available.

Times	Session	Rooms
1:30 - 3:00	<p>Update on the Drug Checking Community of Practice & Drug Checking Action Lab: Crafting the Future Together – Part 2</p> <p>Facilitated by: Julie-Soleil Meeson</p> <p>Facilitators & Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data Sharing - Doris Payer Continuing Education about Drugs - Antoine Marcheterre Training - Roxanne Hallal Sustainability and Future Directions - Hayley Thompson Community Engagement - Tanis Oldenburger Political, Legal, and Regulatory Frameworks - Karen McDonald Technology - Jarred Aasen <p>This interactive workshop invites you to play an active role in shaping the future of our drug checking community. Together, we will refine key focus areas such as Data Sharing, Training, and Community Engagement, ensuring they align with the evolving needs of our community.</p> <p>Through dynamic group discussions and hands-on activities, you will help identify concrete next steps and actionable strategies to strengthen our collective impact. This session is an opportunity to move beyond passive data exchange and actively work toward implementing effective training, meaningful discussions, and tool development for our community.</p> <p>Your input and engagement are essential in ensuring that our efforts lead to real-world impact.</p> <p>Let's shape the future of drug checking together!</p>	M-450
3 - 3:30	Break - coffee and snacks	

Day 2: Schedule February 25

This part of the conference will be conducted in English. No interpretation is available.

Times	Session	Rooms
3:30 - 4:30	<p>Strategies and Innovations to Prevent Burnout and Trauma in the Context of the Toxic Drug Supply Ali McMullin (il), Intervenant psychosocial, Sub Check, Service de vérification des substances de PACT de rue</p> <p>This presentation explores innovative approaches to support teams facing the toxic drug supply. It focuses on organizational strategies aimed at preventing burnout and secondary trauma, addressing aspects such as human resources management, scheduling, and suicide prevention techniques. The goal is to share practical ideas to strengthen the resilience of practitioners and improve staff retention in this demanding context.</p>	M-450
3:30 - 4:30	<p>Defining drug checking: exploring language and terminology used by Ontario's Drug Checking Community (ODCC) and BCCSU Drug Checking Hayley Thompson (she/her), Toronto's Drug Checking Service and Ontario's Drug Checking Community & David Byers (he/they), Training Coordinator, BCCSU</p> <p>BCCSU Drug Checking and Toronto's Drug Checking Service (the flagship program of Ontario's Drug Checking Community) are two of the most established community-based drug checking programs in the country. This presentation will explore how each program describes its services and communicates its findings from samples checked.</p>	M-465
4:30 - 4:35	Déplacement pour mot de la fin	M-450
4:35 - 5	<p>Next Steps and Closing Remarks Julie-Soleil Meeson, Doris Payer & Jarred Aasen</p>	M-450

Overdose Prevention Services at the Event

Harm Reduction Resources

Do you need supplies, drug checking services, or a safe consumption space? Three harm reduction organizations will be present to support you. Prevention and consumption materials will be available.

If you're looking for information on services in Montreal, resources will be available at the welcome table.

□ Visit the welcome table to check the schedule.

There will be designated times to visit the mobile units—and to use them!

A big thank you to GRIP, SABSA, and L'Anonyme!



Our Team

Coordination Team

Jarred Aasen, DRED Project
Julie-Soleil Meeson, AIDQ & DRED Project
Jennifer Noseworthy, CCSA
Doris Payer, CCSA
Chloe Sage, DRED Project/Interior Health BC

Logistics and Program Planning Committee

CCSA, and the DRED Project want to give a big shout-out to all these incredible folks who pulled off this event in record time. **Your availability, patience, and proactiveness were truly outstanding.** We couldn't have asked for a better team. Thank you all so much!

Kay Angliss McDowell, BC Centre on Substance Use
Maiah Erica Capel, CCSA
Élise Étienne, AIDQ
Ana Gabrielle F. Guzman, AIDQ
Roxanne Hallal, GRIP
Kayla Halliday, Spectrum Drug Checking
Courtney Harrop, Tla'amin Nation
Antoine Marcheterre, Interior Health
Ali McMullin, SubCheck/PACT de rue
Gabrielle Nadaï, CISSS de Laval
Warren O'Briain, BCCSU
Tanis Oldenburger, Mountainside Harm Reduction
Mia Pohl, Vancouver Coastal Health
Douglas Rusk, Spectrum Drug Checking
Hayley Thompson, Toronto's DC Service
Andrea Wagner, CCSA
Tyler Watts, Parkdale Queen West CHC

Expressions of Gratitude and Acknowledgments

A heartfelt thank you to all the individuals

who have generously devoted their time to present, moderate, host, volunteer, and actively participate in the important discussions surrounding drug checking. In a world where drug policy continues to have devastating consequences in Canada, your presence and contributions are instrumental in saving lives and nurturing our communities. We are incredibly fortunate to have such a supportive and dedicated DC community across Canada.

Special Thanks to Our Generous Sponsors

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the organizations that have provided invaluable financial support, making the DC Symposium possible.

Your unwavering support has not only brought this conference to life but has also made it accessible to countless individuals. Your commitment to our cause and dedication to advancing knowledge in the field of drug checking is sincerely appreciated.



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