

ANKORS East – FTIR Drug Checking Program
Annual General Meeting Report
Location: Cranbrook, B.C.
Reporting Period: June 1, 2024 – June 1, 2025

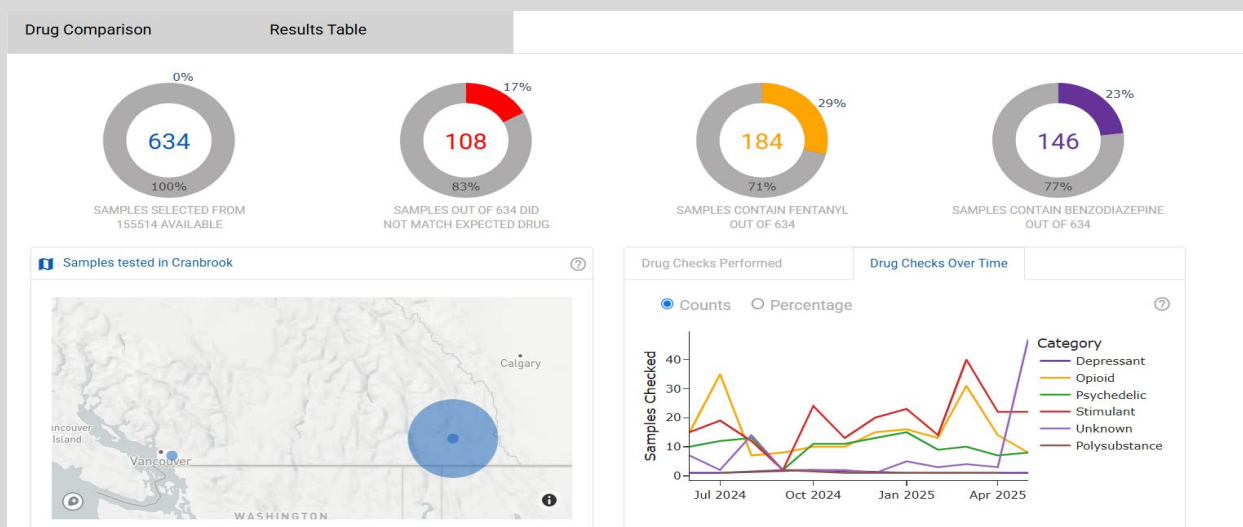
Program Overview

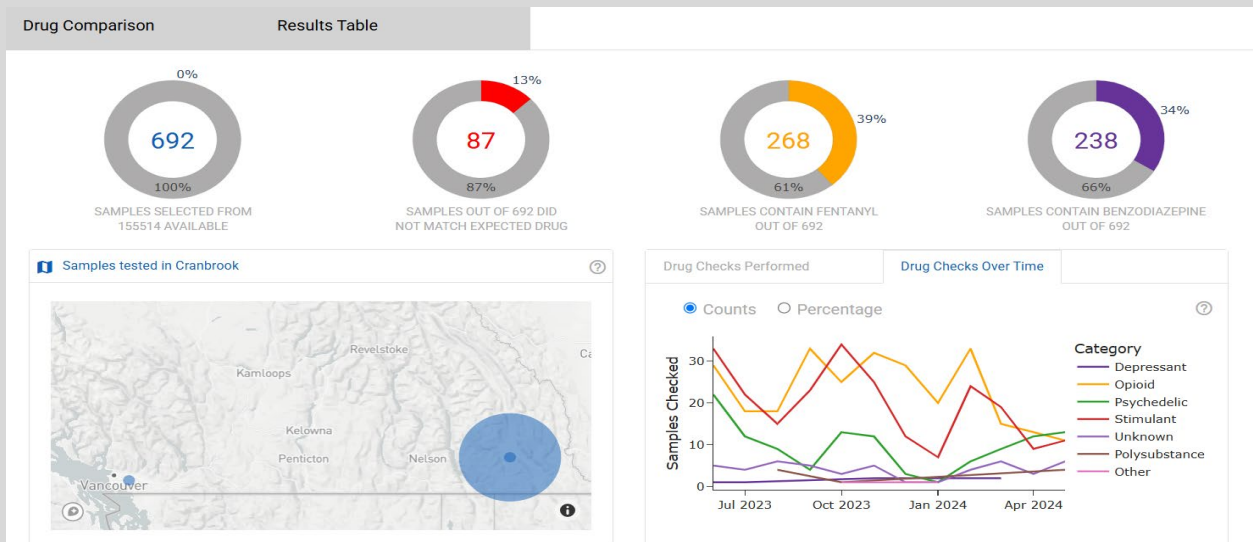
The FTIR drug checking program operated by ANKORS East continues to deliver essential harm reduction services throughout Cranbrook and the broader East Kootenay region. Funded by Interior Health, the program provides free, confidential, and non-judgmental drug checking using Fourier-Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy and immunoassay test strips. These services equip people who use drugs with critical information to help them make safer decisions and avoid potentially fatal overdoses.

By identifying the contents of unregulated substances, we support clients in recognizing dangerous adulterants and mismatched expectations around potency or composition. The service also functions as a valuable public health surveillance tool, offering timely insight into regional drug trends and enabling rapid community response to emerging threats in the supply. Our approach centers dignity, harm reduction, and cultural safety, while striving to reduce stigma and increase accessibility for those who use substances.

Key Metrics

- **Samples Analyzed (2024–2025): 634**
- **Samples Analyzed (2023–2024): 692**
- **Decrease from Last Reporting Period: 8.38%**
- **Substances Most Frequently Detected:** Methamphetamine, Fentanyl, or Fentanyl analogues, cocaine, Ketamine, MDMA, benzodiazepines
- **Common Adulterants Identified:** Xylazine, erythritol, mannitol, phenacetin, caffeine, and occasionally unidentified compounds





Program Highlights

- **Service Expansion:** Drug checking was delivered both at our fixed location in Cranbrook and through sample collection outreach to Kimberley, Fernie, Creston, and other East Kootenay communities.
- **New Staff Addition:** During this period, we gained another drug checking technician at ANKORS East, Taylor Yonkman, who brings years of experience in festival drug checking and harm reduction to our team.
- **Festival Support:** We continue to support both Wicked Woods Music Festival and Shambhala Music Festival by sending our FTIR machine along with trained technicians and harm reductionists to provide onsite drug checking services. Our new staff member, Taylor Yonkman, has taken over management of the Shambhala harm reduction crew, bringing her expertise and leadership to this important initiative.
- **Peer Involvement:** Our peer workers remain central to the program's success, using lived experience to build trust and bridge gaps between services and people who use substances.
- **Community Warnings:** Dangerous trends detected through testing led to the timely release of public drug alerts, developed in collaboration with Interior Health and regional stakeholders.
- **Staff Development:** ANKORS East staff received training in emerging substances, FTIR interpretation, and harm reduction communications through provincial partners like the BC CSU. Two staff from ANKORS East recently attended the Vancouver Drug Checking Symposium in February of this year. These events continue to be rich with knowledge exchange and opportunities to network with Drug Checking Technicians from across the country.

Cranbrook's Unique Down Supply

Cranbrook's down supply continues to be somewhat unique when compared to other communities in the Interior Health region. Variations in composition, potency, and the presence of specific adulterants underscore the importance of localized drug checking. These findings reinforce the need for region-specific harm reduction responses and timely community alerts that reflect local trends.

Over the past year, we have seen a decrease in people bringing down for testing. This decline appears to be linked to several compounding factors, including the loss of EKNPUD's peer-led outreach and sample collection, increased displacement of people living rough due to Bylaw enforcement or movement into the local encampment, and a seemingly less potent supply of down circulating in Cranbrook compared to previous periods.

Program Challenges

Despite these successes, the program has faced several significant challenges over the past year:

- **Loss of EKNPUD:** The closure of our valued partner organization, the East Kootenay Network of People who Use Drugs (EKNPUD), has had a considerable impact on our work. EKNPUD provided critical peer-led outreach, education, and sample collection services. Their absence has resulted in fewer samples being submitted, particularly from marginalized or rural populations, and has left a gap in peer engagement capacity that ANKORS East is working to rebuild.
- **Reduced Sample Collection:** The number of samples analyzed decreased by **8.38%** compared to the previous reporting period (from **692** to **634**). This decline correlates with reduced peer-led outreach and mobile engagement capacity following the loss of EKNPUD and highlights the ongoing need for strong, community-based partnerships to support consistent service access.
- **Stigma and Privacy Concerns:** Deep-rooted stigma surrounding substance use continues to deter individuals from accessing drug checking services. In smaller communities, concerns about anonymity and confidentiality can discourage people from using the service, even when they are aware of the risks of the unregulated drug supply.
- **Complex and High-Risk Drug Mixtures:** The unregulated drug market continues to evolve, with increasingly complex and hazardous mixtures such as fentanyl combined with benzodiazepines, xylazine, or nitazenes. These combinations are more difficult to detect and analyze and pose increased health risks to users. Communicating these findings clearly and accessibly to clients remains a top priority.
- **Resource Constraints:** Our current staff and infrastructure are stretched thin in trying to meet growing demand across the region. Expanding mobile services and responding to emerging drug trends requires additional human and material resources.

- **Lack of Mobile Infrastructure:** The program currently lacks a dedicated mobile drug checking/outreach van, which limits our ability to provide consistent, private, and accessible services outside of Cranbrook. A properly equipped vehicle would enable us to bring services directly to clients in remote and rural communities while protecting confidentiality and enhancing safety for staff and participants alike.
- **Difficulty Securing Host Locations:** Establishing regular, supportive locations to host drug checking services in other communities has proven challenging. Despite increasing awareness of the overdose crisis, some organizations and municipalities remain hesitant to associate with harm reduction services due to stigma or reputational concerns. This has limited our ability to expand our reach in areas where need is high, but support is lacking.
- **Suspension of Services in Invermere:** Drug checking in Invermere, B.C. has been cancelled for the time being, as the local harm reduction coordinator from the Shuswap Band we had been working with is on extended leave. We are currently exploring options to resume services when possible.

Looking Forward: 2025–2026 Priorities

- **Rebuilding Peer-Led Capacity:** ANKORS East is prioritizing efforts to re-establish peer leadership and outreach by developing new peer programs, advisory groups, and training initiatives rooted in lived experience. We are also actively exploring opportunities to bring another drug user network to Cranbrook to help fill the gap left by EKNPUD and ensure that the voices and expertise of people who use drugs continue to guide our work.
- **Mobile Expansion:** Securing a mobile drug checking van remains a top goal for expanding services across the East Kootenays and ensuring clients in all communities can access this life-saving support. A dedicated mobile unit would help overcome logistical barriers, reduce stigma through discreet access, and allow for more frequent outreach in remote areas.
- **Public Education:** We aim to host educational workshops, distribute harm reduction materials, and increase our digital and community presence to raise awareness about drug trends and safer use practices. These efforts are designed to not only inform, but also to empower individuals and communities to engage with drug checking services.
- **Partnership Development:** Continued collaboration with Indigenous organizations, shelters, public health units, and mental health services will strengthen wraparound support for our clients. We are also working to engage more community stakeholders and local governments to broaden our network of support.
- **Meeting Community Demand in Fernie:** As community members in Fernie have clearly expressed a need for drug checking services, ANKORS East will continue working closely with EKASS Fernie to develop a sustainable and accessible model

for delivering services in the area. We see Fernie as a key partner in our regional harm reduction strategy and are excited to strengthen our presence there.

Acknowledgments

We extend sincere thanks to Interior Health for their continued support and funding of this vital service. We are also deeply grateful to our staff, peer workers, and community partners, and we acknowledge the significant contribution of EKNPUD, whose advocacy, grassroots leadership, and reach into the community of people who use drugs helped to build this program into what it is today.

ANKORS East remains committed to offering dignified, person-centered, and evidence-based services to those most impacted by the toxic drug crisis in the East Kootenays.

