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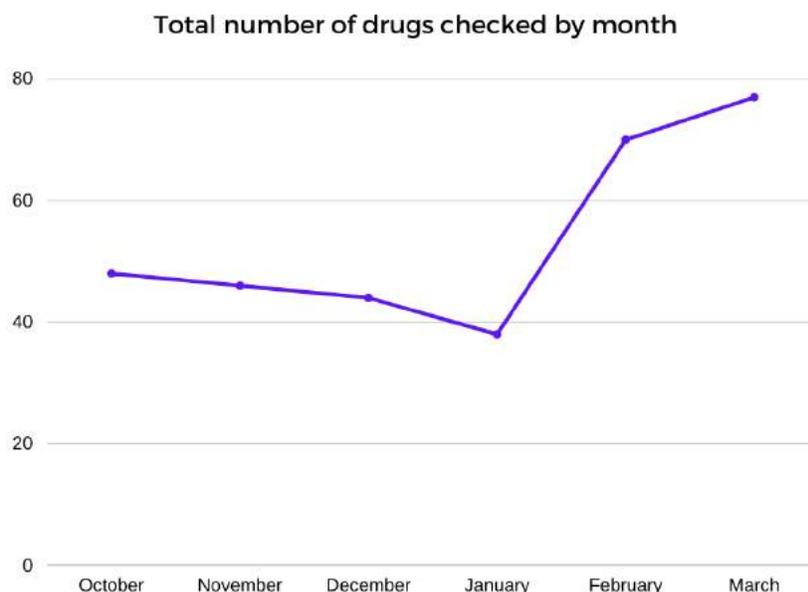
ANKORS Drug Checking Program Report *October 2021 – March 2022*

In October 2021, I took over as the coordinator for the drug checking program at ANKORS. This report highlights important changes and updates to the ANKORS' drug checking program. It also presents drug checking data from October 2021 through March 2022 and describes noteworthy trends that have developed in the illicit drug supply.

Between October 2021 and March 2022, ANKORS tested 323 drug samples. Testing was steady through the fall and early winter, with about 40-50 samples tested each month. In February and March, testing increased to over 70 samples each month.

Importantly, the drug checking program has expanded to incorporate regular testing in Castlegar, Grand Forks, and Trail, in addition to providing ongoing services in Nelson. Testing in these other communities was sporadic during the fall, but regular bi-weekly testing has been available in each community since January. I now travel to each of these communities (Castlegar, Grand Forks, and Trail) to offer drug checking two times each month. I have also begun to offer drug checking services occasionally at The Hub in Nelson.

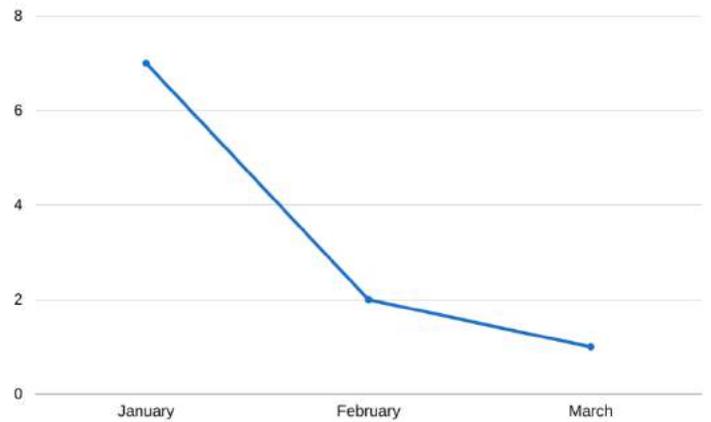
Please see the graphs and images below for more details regarding the number of samples tested in each community from October 2021 through March 2022.



Number of drugs checked in Nelson by month

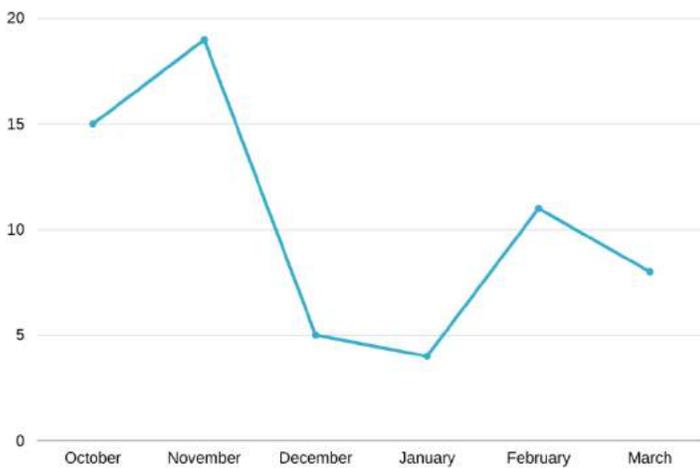


Number of drugs checked in Castlegar by month

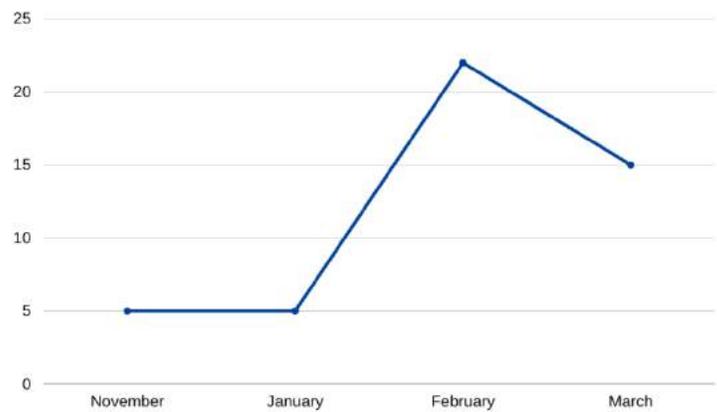


** No data exists for October, November, or December 2021, as ANKORS did not offer drug checking services in Castlegar until January 2022

Number of drugs checked in Trail by month

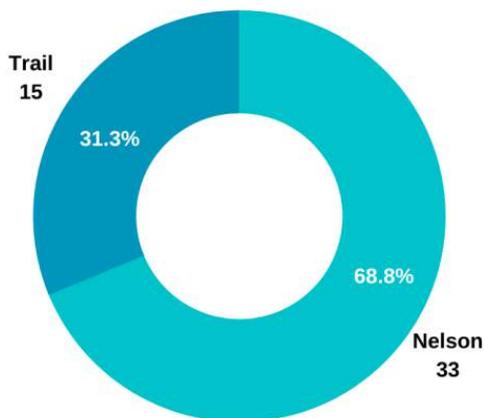


Number of drugs checked in Grand Forks by month

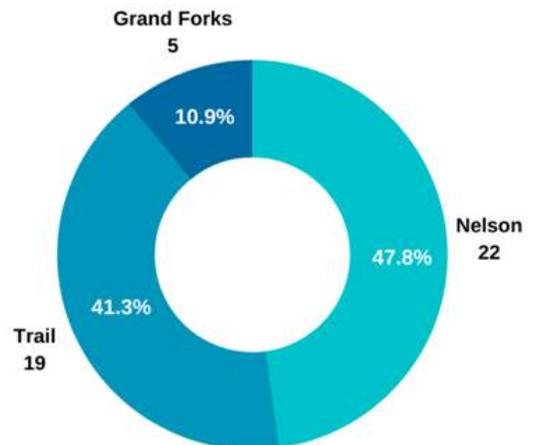


** No data exists for October or December 2021 as there was no drug checking conducted in Grand Forks during these months.

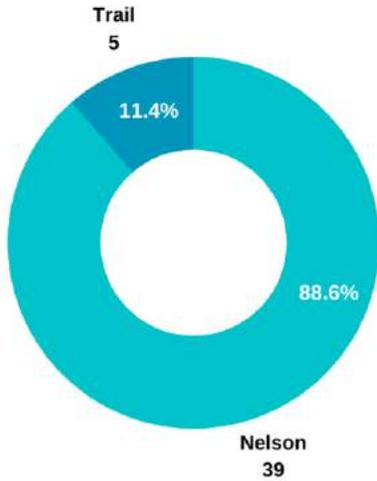
Number of drugs checked in October 2021



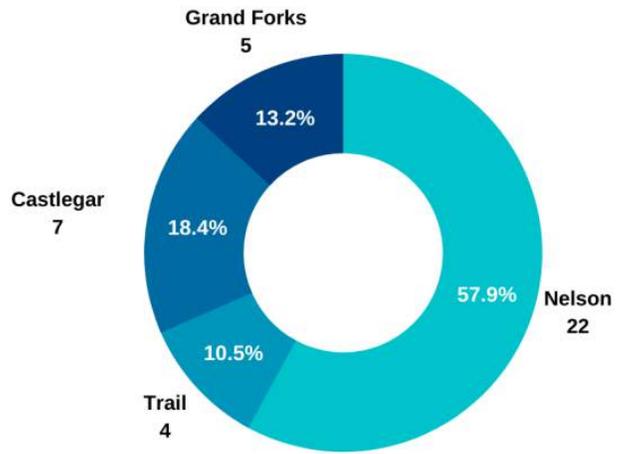
Number of drugs checked in November 2021



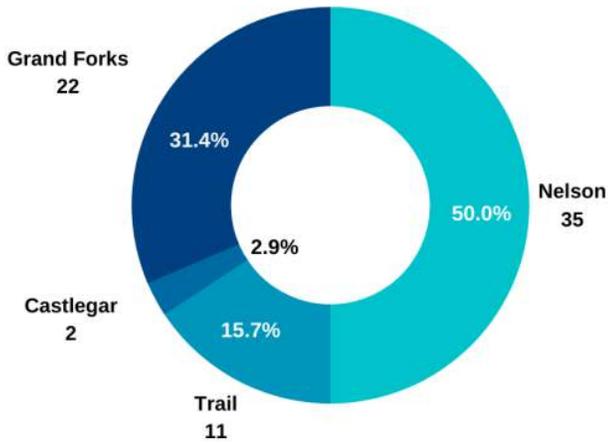
Number of drugs checked in December 2021



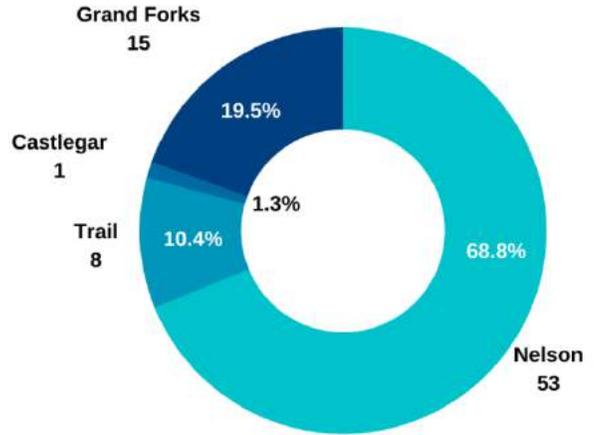
Number of drugs checked in January 2022



Number of drugs checked in February 2022

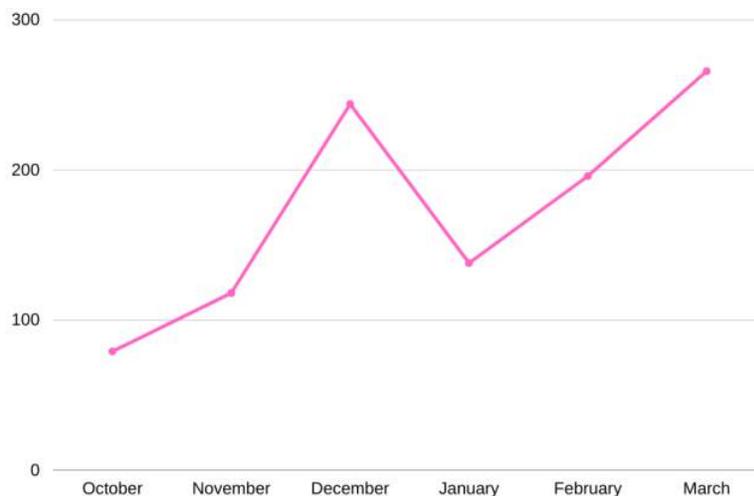


Number of drugs checked in March 2022



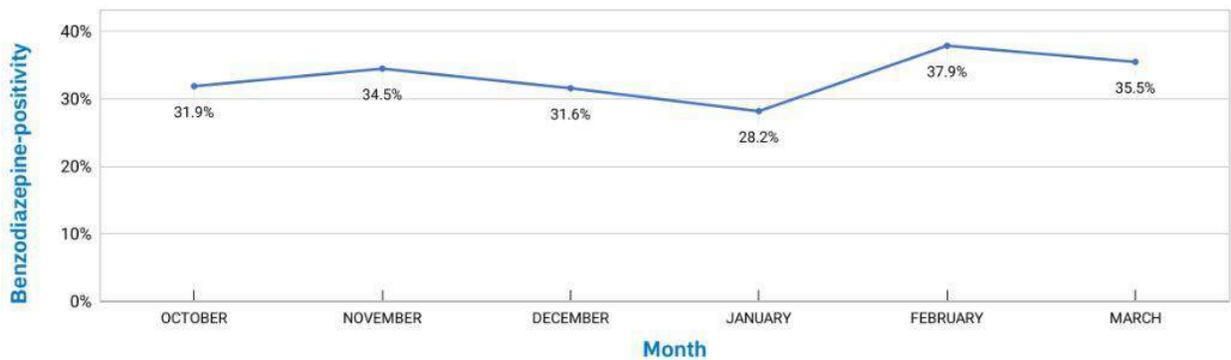
The ANKORS drug checking program has continued to distribute fentanyl test strips to service users and community members for at-home use. From October 2021 through March 2022, ANKORS distributed over 1400 fentanyl test strips. Please see the graph below for a breakdown of fentanyl test strip distribution by month.

Number of fentanyl test strips distributed by month

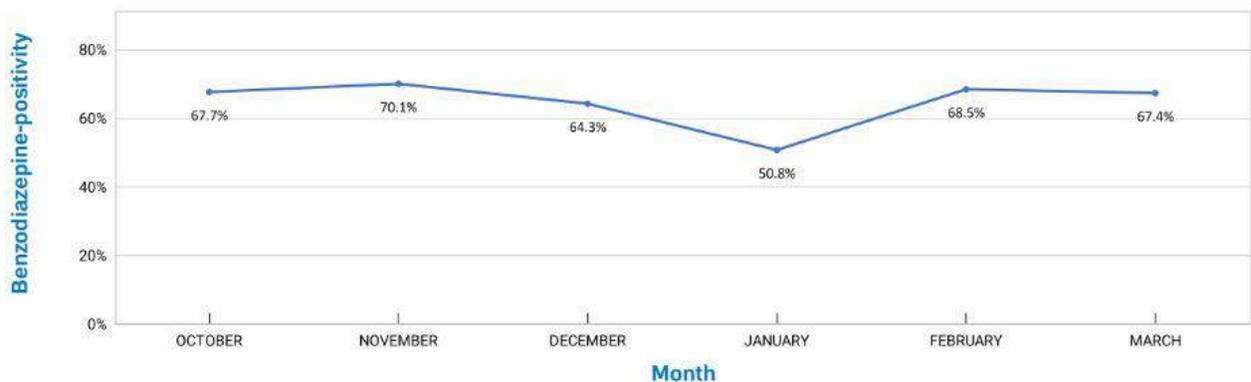


Regional and provincial data suggests that benzodiazepines continue to adulterate the supply of illicit opioids. The proportion of down or fentanyl samples that are adulterated with benzodiazepines has continued to increase steadily over the past year. This trend has been observed across the province, including in Nelson and the other communities where ANKORS offers drug checking services. Please see the graphs below, which are taken from the BC Centre on Substance Use's monthly drug checking reports. These graphs provide further information regarding the proportion of opioid samples that tested positive for benzodiazepines between the months of October 2021 and March 2022. The first graph shows provincial data, whereas the second graph shows data for only the Interior Health Authority.

Percentage of opioids testing positive for benzodiazepines in the past 6 months



Percentage of opioids testing positive for benzodiazepines in the past 6 months



Benzodiazepine adulteration of opioids can cause drowsiness, heavy sedation, black-outs, and amnesia. These symptoms can leave people vulnerable to physical and sexual assault, violence, and theft. Additionally, the presence of benzodiazepines in opioids complicates overdose presentation and response, and presents unique challenges regarding benzodiazepine dependence and withdrawal.

In addition to benzodiazepine adulteration of opioid samples, ANKORS drug checking has noted occasional isolated instances of carfentanil adulteration in the illicit opioid supply. These instances have been confirmed by further laboratory analysis in Vancouver and Victoria. Carfentanil is 100 times stronger than fentanyl and presents a serious risk of overdose and death.

ANKORS drug checking results from October 2021 through March 2022 indicate that non-opioid samples – including methamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA, ketamine, etc. – have been largely unadulterated, meaning that no cuts or buffs have been added. Occasionally, adulterants are detected in non-opioid samples, but no trends have been observed that are worth noting.

In addition to expanding drug checking services to other communities in the West Kootenays, I have supported a number of sites in the region to apply for a designation to be a B.C. Distributed Drug Checking Site. Through a Health Canada exemption, this designation allows sites and individuals to legally collect, store, and transport samples for the purpose of drug checking. ANKORS staff can now collect samples from other communities and transport them to Nelson to be tested, with legal protection, as long as they follow a specific protocol for sample collection, transport, and storage. Robin Van Stolk and his colleague Eric Eligh now hold a designation to collect and transport samples to ANKORS for testing, as do Sheila Adcock and her outreach staff at Career Development Services in Trail. I am continuing to work with individuals and organizations in Castlegar and Grand Forks to set up more distributed drug checking sites in order to increase access to drug checking services throughout the region.

For a number of years, ANKORS has had access to confirmatory testing for further laboratory analysis of specific samples through the Drug Analysis Service (DAS) in Vancouver. Recently, I have collaborated with the team at Substance in Victoria (Vancouver Island Drug Checking Project) to increase access to confirmatory testing. Substance uses Paper Spray Mass Spectrometry, and can detect a number of relatively common compounds that are often undetectable by the FTIR spectrometer at ANKORS, such as low levels of benzodiazepines and carfentanil. This partnership allows ANKORS to send more samples for further analysis, and is a timelier alternative to DAS, as results are usually returned within a few business days as opposed to a few weeks. ANKORS continues to collaborate with DAS for confirmatory testing of select samples.

Finally, the ANKORS drug checking program will support testing at Shambhala this summer. Chloe Sage is taking the lead on organizing harm reduction and drug checking services at the festival, and select ANKORS staff will support the team for parts of the

festival. Efforts will be made to limit disruptions to community drug checking services during the festival season.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and learning about the recent changes to the ANKORS drug checking program. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions regarding the information included in this report. I can be reached by phone at 236-972-7080 or by email at drugcheckankors@gmail.com.

Thank you,

Amelia Martzke

ANKORS Drug Checking Program Coordinator