

# ANKORS Drug Checking Program

## Annual Report 2025–2026

### A Year in Review

The 2025–2026 year was marked by continued growth, stronger partnerships, and an evolving drug supply.

From April 2025 through March 2026, ANKORS checked approximately 933 samples and distributed 2,680 fentanyl test strips across the Kootenay Boundary region. Behind these numbers are hundreds of conversations, opportunities for education, and moments where timely information supported safer decision making.

The unregulated opioid supply continued to evolve throughout the year. Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues remained common, often in combination with benzodiazepines. As xylazine appeared less frequently in local samples, attention increasingly shifted toward medetomidine, a veterinary sedative emerging in both local and provincial drug checking data. As our understanding of this substance continues to develop, ongoing monitoring, education, and information sharing remain important. Counterfeit pharmaceuticals and misrepresented substances also continued to appear, reinforcing the importance of accessible drug checking services.

While substance identification remains a core function of the program, the service continues to play a broader role in education, relationship building, risk communication, and connection to care.

### The Numbers

- Approximately 933 samples checked
- Approximately 192 samples submitted for secondary laboratory analysis
- 6 samples submitted to Drug Analysis Service for confirmatory testing
- 2,680 fentanyl test strips distributed
- 20+ education sessions delivered
- Approximately 250 people reached through education and training
- Service provided throughout Nelson, Trail, Castlegar, and Grand Forks

## Highlights from the Year

- Medetomidine emerged in the local unregulated supply and became an increasing focus of monitoring and education efforts.
- Participated in the provincial medetomidine test strip pilot project.
- Re-established and strengthened collaboration with Nelson Police Department and Drug Analysis Service, supporting confirmatory testing and regional monitoring.
- Contributed local data and observations to alerts and public health communications.
- Trained and certified an additional drug checking technician, strengthening program capacity and sustainability.
- Expanded education and outreach efforts with students, healthcare workers, community service providers, volunteers, and community partners.
- Strengthened regular engagement at North Shore supported housing, improving access to services and building ongoing relationships with residents and staff.

## What We Saw in the Supply

### Benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines remained a consistent presence in the local opioid supply throughout the year. Alongside commonly identified compounds such as bromazolam and desalkylgidazepam, secondary laboratory analysis and provincial monitoring identified emerging benzodiazepines including ethylflualprazolam and phenazolam.

These substances contribute to prolonged sedation, memory impairment, blackouts, and increased overdose risk when combined with opioids. Their continued presence has had a significant impact on both service users and drug checking efforts, highlighting the importance of ongoing monitoring and information sharing.

### Medetomidine

One of the most significant developments this year was the emergence of medetomidine in the local supply. This veterinary sedative has contributed to changes in substance effects, overdose presentations, and withdrawal experiences. The introduction of medetomidine test strips added another layer of risk detection and supported informed decision making.

## **Counterfeit Pharmaceuticals**

Counterfeit pharmaceuticals continue to appear throughout the region. Samples sold as known medications were found to contain unexpected substances, highlighting the importance of testing and ongoing public education. These findings remain particularly relevant for youth and individuals who may not otherwise access harm reduction services.

## **An Increasingly Variable Opioid Supply**

Fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, benzodiazepines, and emerging substances continue to appear in changing combinations and concentrations. The opioid supply remains highly variable, making it difficult to anticipate effects or accurately assess risk based on appearance, source, or previous experiences.

## **Beyond Substance Identification**

Drug checking is often thought of as a machine that identifies substances. In reality, much of the work happens through conversation.

Questions about a sample often become discussions about health, housing, treatment options, mental health, relationships, overdose prevention, and making sense of a drug supply that can vary significantly between substances, communities, and even individual batches.

People access the service for many reasons. Some are concerned about unexpected effects, some are looking for reassurance, and others are simply curious about what is in a substance. This curiosity creates opportunities for learning, conversation, and informed decision making.

The program continues to support individuals in accessing healthcare, detox services, mental health and substance use supports, outreach teams, and other community resources when requested. For some individuals, the service serves as a first point of contact with supports they may not have otherwise accessed.

## **Education and Community Engagement**

Education remained a key focus throughout the year.

More than 20 education sessions were delivered to students, healthcare workers, community service providers, volunteers, and community partners. Topics included emerging drug trends, counterfeit pharmaceuticals, overdose response, drug checking, and harm reduction principles.

These conversations help build awareness, strengthen community knowledge, reduce stigma, and support more confident responses to an evolving drug landscape.

## **Program Development and Partnerships**

This year focused not only on service delivery, but also on strengthening the foundation of the program.

Efforts included improvements to documentation practices, workflow consistency, equipment organization, quality assurance processes, and regional communication pathways.

Partnerships continued to expand across healthcare, public health, community services, education, law enforcement, and provincial drug checking networks. Re-establishing access to Drug Analysis Service strengthened our ability to investigate unusual findings, support local alerts, and contribute to broader drug supply monitoring efforts. Secondary laboratory analysis and confirmatory testing continue to play an important role in identifying emerging substances, supporting quality assurance, and expanding our understanding of an increasingly complex drug supply.

Regular drug checking presence at North Shore Inn supported housing continued to strengthen relationships with residents and staff. Consistent on site engagement helped reduce barriers to accessing services, increase awareness of drug checking, and create opportunities for ongoing education, conversation, and support.

Training and certification of an additional drug checking technician improved service sustainability and strengthened program capacity moving forward.

## **Looking Ahead**

Priorities for the coming year include:

- Expanding youth and family education opportunities
- Continuing to strengthen regional access to drug checking services
- Monitoring emerging substances and changing drug trends
- Supporting ongoing staff training and program sustainability
- Increasing collaboration with healthcare and community partners
- Continuing to improve access to accurate, timely, and practical information

## Closing Reflection

One of the most meaningful aspects of this work has been witnessing the trust people place in the service.

What begins as a question about a substance often becomes a conversation about something much larger. These conversations continue to highlight the complexity of substance use, the humanity of the people we meet, and the importance of accessible information and support.

Harm reduction is one piece of a much larger picture. Health, mental health, housing, relationships, community, treatment, recovery, and access to accurate information all influence outcomes. Drug checking is one piece of a broader network of supports. At its core, it provides information, encourages conversation, and helps people make informed decisions.

As the supply continues to evolve, so do the questions people bring to the service. Our role is not always to have the answers, but to provide clear information, stay curious, and continue learning alongside our community.

The work continues to remind us that behind every sample is a person, and behind every result is an opportunity for conversation.

Thank you to our clients, partners, funders, volunteers, and community members who continue to support this work.

