



ANKORS East Drug Checking Program

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

James Kaufman | Cranbrook, B.C. | March 31st, 2025 – March 31st, 2026

ANKORS

Program Summary

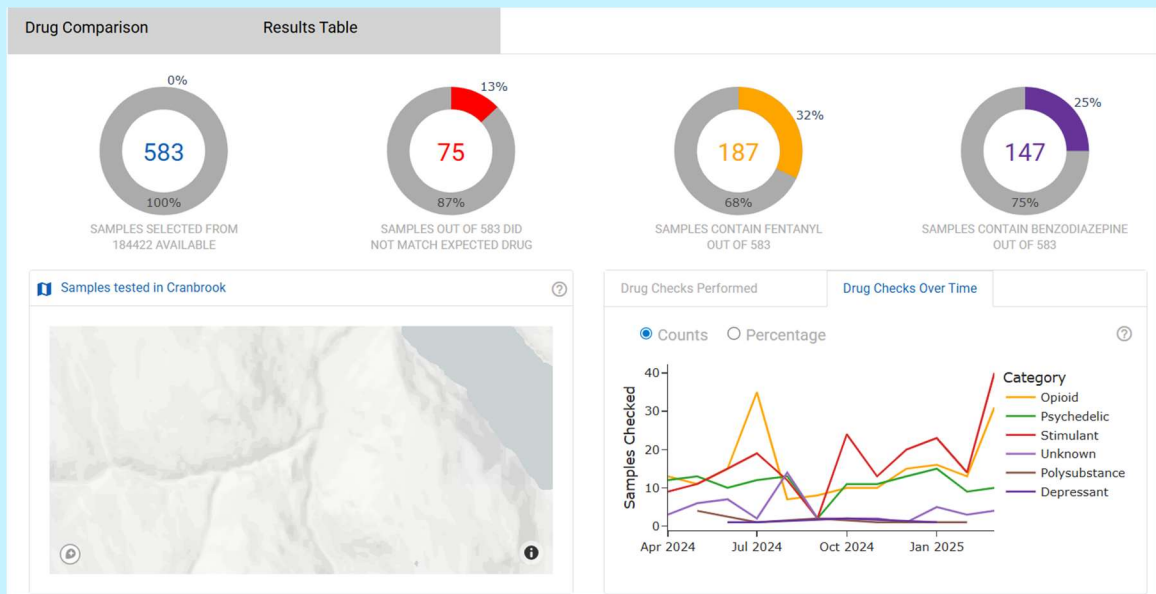
The FTIR Drug Checking Program operated by ANKORS East provides essential harm reduction services throughout Cranbrook and the broader East Kootenay region. Funded by Interior Health, the program offers free, confidential, and non-judgmental drug checking using FTIR spectroscopy and immunoassay test strips. These services provide people who use drugs with critical information to support safer decision-making and help reduce the risk of overdose within an increasingly toxic and rapidly changing unregulated drug supply. By identifying the contents of substances, the service helps detect dangerous adulterants, unexpected contaminants, and inconsistencies in potency or composition. The program also serves as an important public health surveillance tool by monitoring regional drug trends and supporting rapid community response to emerging threats in the local supply. Our work is grounded in dignity, cultural safety, and harm reduction, while striving to reduce stigma and improve access to reliable information, services, and support for people who use substances.

In November 2025, ANKORS East acquired a second FTIR machine with the goal of expanding drug checking services beyond the ANKORS East office and increasing accessibility throughout the region. This machine was purchased through funding awarded to the City of Cranbrook as part of ongoing efforts to address and respond to the opioid crisis and the increasing harms associated with the toxic and unpredictable drug supply. The addition of a second FTIR machine significantly increases ANKORS East's capacity to provide drug checking services in a wider range of settings. While one machine remains available at the ANKORS East office for regular scheduled services, the second machine allows staff to bring drug checking directly into the community through outreach initiatives, events, and visits to other communities throughout the East Kootenay region. This expansion improves access for individuals who may face barriers to attending office-based services and helps ensure more people are able to access timely, confidential, and non-judgmental information about the substances they intend to use.

The emergence of medetomidine (a veterinary tranquilizer) in the unregulated drug supply, along with recent media attention surrounding Cychlorphine (N-Propionitrile chlorphine – a synthetic opioid), has created growing concern within the community and increased fear around the unpredictability of the toxic drug supply. As a result, we have seen a noticeable increase in individuals accessing our office for drug checking services to better understand the contents of their substances and reduce the risk of overdose or other harmful effects. As the drug supply continues to change rapidly, with new and increasingly potent substances appearing more frequently, more people are seeking reliable information and harm reduction support to help them make safer and more informed decisions.

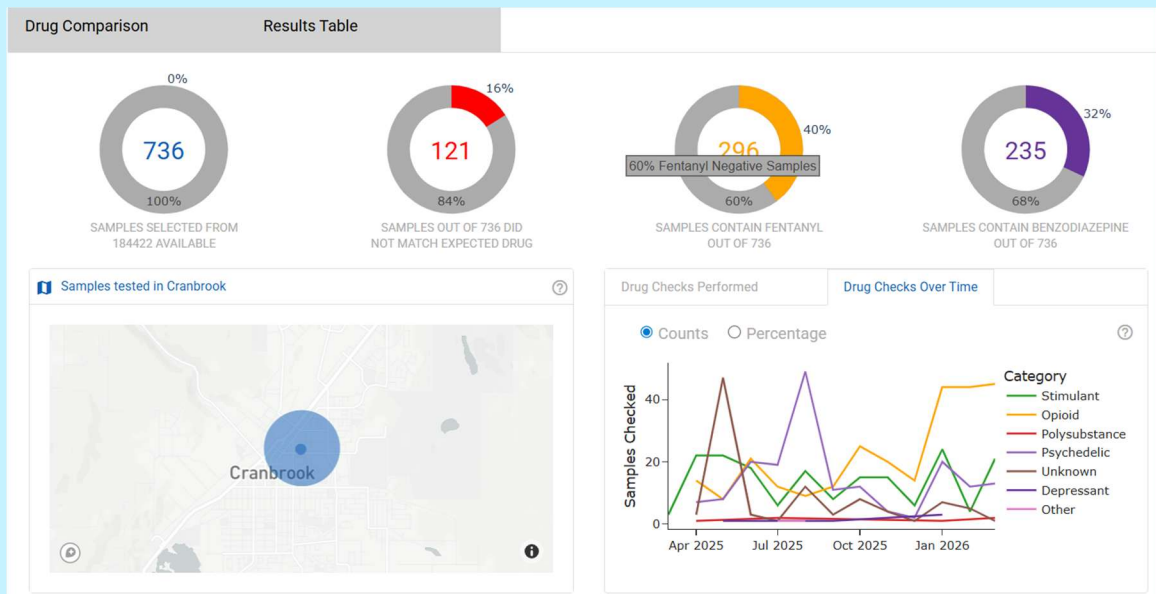
KEY METRICS

- Samples analyzed – March 31st, 2024 – March 31st, 2025: **583**
- Samples analyzed – March 31st, 2025 – March 31st, 2026: **736**
- Increase from last reporting period: **26.24%**
- Substances most frequently detected: Fentanyl, or Fentanyl analogues (primarily Ortho-Fluorofentanyl and Para-Fluorofentanyl), Methamphetamine, Cocaine, Ketamine, MDMA – Benzodiazepines and Medetomidine commonly detected with immunoassay test strips in down samples



March 31st, 2024-March 31st, 2025 ↑

↓ March 31st, 2025-March 31st, 2026



TRENDS SEEN IN DRUG CHECKING

The biggest trend I'm noticing in drug checking is that the fentanyl/fentanyl analogue concentrations seem to be reducing in down samples as time goes on. Many people are reporting that the current supply is so low in opioid content that they are unable to get un-sick without using large amounts. This is creating a dangerous situation for folks considering the presence of benzodiazepines and medetomidine. People are getting high, but not necessarily from the substance they want.

Another noticeable trend we are seeing is many individuals coming into test Methamphetamine are reporting that the meth is making them tired/not working, causing moderate to extreme headaches and stomach aches, and is burning black quite quickly when smoked in a bubble pipe. Due to what we are seeing when testing meth, I believe there has been a drop in "quality" with Methamphetamine so to speak rather than there being something nefarious going on. The meth we are testing is consistently coming back as Methamphetamine with no cuts/buffs detected. Many large drug busts have occurred that have upset the supply as well.

More and more individuals are coming in with drugs purchased from online vendors that ship out of British Columbia. Most of these online drug samples we are seeing are MDMA, LSD, Cocaine, and Ketamine. Occasionally we also see 2C-B, 3-MMC, and 4-MMC from these online vendors as well. More often than not the substances are as advertised, but we have seen cuts/buffs in the Cocaine and Ketamine from these sites. There are quite a few of these sites, and they all claim that the substances are "tested for purity" before sale. One site will often post results from Substance UVIC to help advertise their product.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

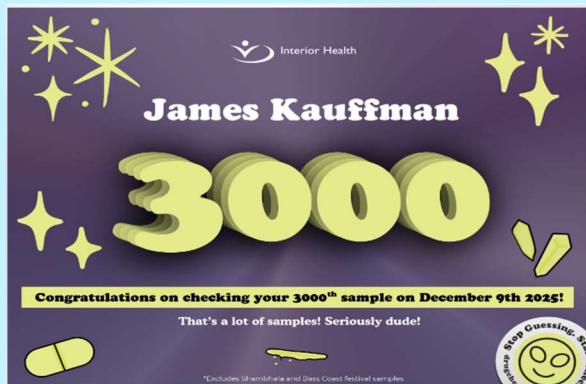
- **Second FTIR acquired:** The second FTIR is being used under a city of Cranbrook program called the Kootenay Peer Outreach Project (K-POP). A minivan was also purchased by the city of Cranbrook to be used by those working on the K-POP program when providing outreach.



- **Weekly testing at the Step-Beyond Shelter:** This reporting period ANKORS went from providing drug checking at our local shelter once per month on cheque day to providing drug checking once per week. I or our other technician (Taylor Yonkman)

set up the service at the shelter from 9am-12pm every Wednesday, and 9am-4pm on cheque day. On average we see anywhere from 4-12 samples per visit at the shelter.

- **Drug Checking in Invermere:** Early in 2025, the Addictions Specialist for the Shuswap Band in Invermere took a leave of absence. This halted drug checking services in Invermere. In January of 2025, I was contacted by the new Addictions Specialist with the Shuswap Band to begin drug checking again. We have set up drug checking services 3 times in Invermere so far in 2026 for a total of 14 samples. We are currently working on a more consistent schedule for testing in Invermere since we received our mobile UPHNS (Urgent Public Health Needs Site) designation. Hoping to offer drug checking in Invermere on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month.
- **3000th Sample Tested:** On December 9th, 2025, I tested my 3000th sample (not including festival drug checking)



- **Education:** This period we increased the amount of public education sessions regarding drugs, drug checking, and harm reduction.
 - In 2025 we received more calls than ever before from city of Cranbrook employees regarding drugs, drug paraphernalia, and people's belongings being found around the community. In response to this, I created a drug identification and anti-stigma presentation to present to city maintenance workers. So far, we have run two separate presentations for the city, with more to come. (November 2025 and April 2026)
 - Taylor Yonkman (our other FTIR technician and sexual health educator) has been working tirelessly to have ANKORS regain its presence providing harm reduction education in the local school district (school district 5), and school district 6. Through her work on this, I have been able to start providing education sessions for students on drug checking. So far in 2026, I have presented to the Kimberley and Cranbrook alternate schools.

- During this period, I set up a table at the Ktunaxa open house event (September 2025) in Cranbrook, and attended the Canoe Walk in Creston (November 2025) with the Lower Kootenay Band. At the Cranbrook event, I was able to connect with other service providers I don't often work with about the drug checking service, as well as members of the community. At the Creston Canoe Walk event, I took part in the walk from the Creston hospital to the Yaqan Nuki school. At the school, there was lunch and then time to network with Lower Kootenay Band staff and Creston community members. We are currently working with the Nurse Manager for the Lower Kootenay Band to offer drug checking to band members.
- Harm Reduction Education info session at The College of the Rockies – Main dormitory. I was invited by College of the Rockies nursing students to give a presentation to college students living in the dormitories. I brought the FTIR to show to the students and gave an overview of the drug checking program. (November 2025)
- ANKORS hosted an open house at the College of the Rockies where I spoke on a panel about drug checking. The turnout for the event was not as good as we had expected, but the conversations had and questions asked were extremely beneficial for everyone involved. Overall, it was a very good event. (March 2026)
- Our team lead (Polly Sutherland), Taylor, and I were invited to the College of the Rockies to give a presentation about ANKORS services and stigma in healthcare to 3rd year nursing students. I was able to spend an hour of this presentation explaining how drug checking works and trends we see in testing. (March 2026)

Naloxone training:

- In office 1-on-1 trainings – 34 individuals trained between March 31st, 2025 – March 31st, 2026
- Naloxone training for nursing students – 4 individuals trained (May 2025)
- Naloxone trainings for Step-Beyond Shelter staff – 13 staff trained from August 2025 – March 31st, 2026 – Trainings to continue when new staff are hired
- Naloxone training for City of Cranbrook staff – Cranbrook Town Hall – 7 individuals trained (September 2025)
- Naloxone training for Supplement Empire staff – 2 individuals trained (November 2025)
- Naloxone training for St. Eugene Mission casino and security staff – 9 individuals trained (February 2026)

- Naloxone training with Zach Killam for AQ'AM staff – 8-10 individuals trained (Uncertain of exact number of trainees) (March 2026)

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- **Stigma:** The drug checking program in Cranbrook is used almost exclusively by our unhoused population. We are still struggling to get housed folks who use substances to come in to use the service, and the main reason that staff and I are hearing is that people feel uncomfortable coming to the office. Our office sits on a busy street in the center of the community where one can easily be spotted coming in. People see ANKORS as a “rock bottom service,” so being seen coming in to use our services is perceived as a potential to ruin one’s reputation in such a small town.
- **An always evolving drug supply:** The drug supply (mainly Down - street drug mixture generally containing fentanyl, benzodiazepines, etc.) has been continuously evolving. Down samples have become increasingly tough to decipher by FTIR as time goes on. We are relying significantly more on confirmatory testing with Substance UVIC these days to figure out what is in the Down supply. When I first began as a drug checking technician, we would generally see 3-4 components at most within a Down sample. Now, we are sometimes seeing as many as 9 components within Down samples. The crackdown by law enforcement on Fentanyl and Fentanyl precursor materials is a large part of why we are seeing extremely potent substances like Medetomidine end up in Down.
- **Arrests of dealers:** Through the ANKORS East Drug Checking Program’s work with EKNPUD (East Kootenay Network of People who Use Drugs – ended in 2024), a peer-led drug user network, we were able to meet some of the local dealers. It took some time, but eventually trust was gained, and these individuals began to use the drug checking service. These folks consistently came for testing on a regular basis, and generally with a high volume of samples to test. Being able to see what is in the supply before it hits the street is extremely beneficial for our service users, especially for those that use Down. So far in 2026, 3 dealers that regularly used the drug checking service have been arrested. This has had a large impact on the amount of pre-distribution samples we see for testing.
- **Re-criminalization:** With the end of the BC Decriminalization Pilot Program on January 31st, 2026, we have noticed apprehension about drug checking from potential drug testing location sites in other communities. Questions surrounding the safety of potential service users from law enforcement interactions while getting drugs tested is the main concern. I am currently having Cranbrook RCMP Staff Sergeant Barry Graham introduce me via email to the staff sergeants in Creston, Invermere, and the Elk Valley. My plan is to set up meetings between the staff

sergeants and potential testing sites to help clear any concerns surrounding the safety of individuals accessing drug checking.

- **Cranbrook homeless shelter relocation:** During this period, the Step-Beyond Homeless Shelter relocated to a location one block away from the ANKORS East office. This has absolutely skyrocketed our daily visits by service users, which has been good for drug checking, but has also put a strain on our resources. For example, in November of 2024 (before shelter relocation) we had 187 service use visits, and 155 meals/food served. In November of 2025 (after shelter relocation) we had 785 service use visits, and 750 meals/food served. This is roughly a 319% increase. Dealing with different issues that have arisen since the influx of unhoused people in the area around our office has become a constant theme in our day-to-day operations. I and other ANKORS staff are pulled away from our program work quite often.
- **Bad cold and flu season:** This winter was especially bad for staff being sick. For the first time ever, I used up the entirety of my allocated sick time. Taylor Yonkman and I are currently the 2 drug checking technicians for ANKORS East. We are also partners, live together, and have 2 kids under 12. With us both being off sick so often this winter, there were large blocks of time where the drug checking service was not available. We are currently working on training one of our new employees, Abbie Fitzgerald, to become certified as a drug checking technician to make sure issues like this don't happen in the future.

EMERGENCY WINTER SHELTER

ANKORS East again oversaw the operating of the Cranbrook Emergency Winter Shelter this winter. This season, I was put in charge of staffing and operating the shelter when it was in operation. This was our first winter operating the emergency winter shelter out of the Dwelling Place Church. We had some concerns about the neighbourhood around this church not being happy about ANKORS running the emergency shelter there, but we ultimately had no issues with surrounding community members. All things considered, the emergency shelter response went well this year. We were cleared to shelter 20 adults, and we were anywhere from half-full to completely full each night. A majority of the individuals we sheltered were folks who had been kicked out of our local shelter at one time or another, and many of them suffer from complex mental health and substance use issues. I believe that this strongly highlights our community's need for a more supportive and understanding shelter where people who are extremely vulnerable aren't at constant risk of being kicked out or banned. One issue that we ran in to quite often was that many of the non-ANKORS staff we hired to work the emergency shelter this year did not take shifts or even return phone calls/text messages. This put quite a bit of strain on myself and other ANKORS staff, as we were the ones having to take shifts, sometimes after working a full 8 hour day. We are hoping that BC Housing will give us the go-ahead to open a regular winter shelter versus running the emergency winter shelter again next winter. Running a full-time

winter shelter would make it so we could hire regular staff and have them on a schedule instead of waiting for the temperature to dip and then scrambling to find staff to work the shifts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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, community partners, and the City of Cranbrook for helping to get the word out there about drug checking!

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.

ANKORS

The logo for ANKORS features the word "ANKORS" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "O" is replaced by a red AIDS awareness ribbon, which is a stylized loop with two tails. A thin red horizontal line is positioned below the text.

AIDS Network, Outreach & Support Society
East Kootenay