

Keeping Up with the Evidence: Issue 2

Background

Highlights and references of recent publications related to HIV and other STBBIs, harm reduction, and other related work.

Drug testing services

This second issue of *Keeping Up With the Evidence* focuses on literature discussing drug testing as part of harm reduction strategies. These articles provide perspectives on the topic coming from varied locations across the globes, with conclusions which can be useful for the current Albertan context.

The acceptability of rapid fentanyl test strip (Krieger et al., 2018)

Summary: Krieger et al. conducted a study in Rhode Island, USA, to determine the level of willingness of young adults to use rapid fentanyl test strips. These can be used to detect the presence of fentanyl in drug sample, before use, or in urine, after use. The study concluded that there was a very high willingness to use the strips, whether or not the participants had previously experienced overdoses.

Implications: In a context where street-obtained drugs can be contaminated with fentanyl without the knowledge of the user, rapid test strips could be a valuable tool in helping inform people who use drugs about their exposure risk. The high level of willingness to use the strips demonstrated in this study indicates that it could be a valuable component of a harm reduction strategy.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-018-0213-2>

Reference: Krieger, M. S., Yedinak, J. L., Buxton, J. A., Lysyshyn, M., Bernstein, E., Rich, J. D., . . . Marshall, B. D. L. (2018). High willingness to use rapid fentanyl test strips among young adults who use drugs. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 15(1), 7. doi:10.1186/s12954-018-0213-2

Drug testing at music festivals (Day et al., 2018)

Summary: This Australian study is based on a survey conducted at a major music festival in 2016. Participants were asked their opinions regarding drug testing services, whether they would use them if they were available at music festivals, and if having access to testing services could influence their drug use behaviours. The study concludes that festival attendees were in favour of having access to drug checking services and reported that their drug using behaviour would be impacted by the provided information.

Implications: The participants in this study were mostly concerned with drugs being contaminated by methamphetamines and para-methoxyamphetamines rather than fentanyl, but the results could be

extrapolated to the current concerns over fentanyl. This study could be referred to support harm reduction programs at large public events which could include drug testing.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-017-0205-7>

Reference: Day, N., Criss, J., Griffiths, B., Gujral, S. K., John-Leader, F., Johnston, J., & Pit, S. (2018). Music festival attendees' illicit drug use, knowledge and practices regarding drug content and purity: a cross-sectional survey. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 15(1), 1. doi:10.1186/s12954-017-0205-7

Drug testing beyond the nightlife (Sande & Šabić, 2018)

Summary: This study collected attitudes and beliefs around drug testing services in Slovenia, seeking to compare night-life users and harm reduction program users. It concludes that both populations are quite similar in their agreement that drug testing services is a worthwhile risk reduction activity and that it does not increase drug use. The study also points out some other impacts of drug testing services, notably that it can often be the first point of contact between some people who use drugs and harm reduction services. Main obstacles to drug testing were long delays for result and the fear of not remaining anonymous.

Implications: In some contexts, drug testing services have been associated with nightlife recreational users, but this study emphasises the point that these services could see important uptake from high-risk daily users as well. Hours of access and location of service points are therefore important characteristics of such programs.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-018-0208-z>

Reference: Sande, M., & Šabić, S. (2018). The importance of drug checking outside the context of nightlife in Slovenia. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 15(1), 2. doi:10.1186/s12954-018-0208-z

Drug checking program for SCS in Vancouver (Lysyshyn, Dohoo, Forsting, Kerr, & McNeil, 2017)

Summary: This is not an article but an National Post article referring to a presentation which was given at the Harm Reduction conference in Montreal in 2017. It nevertheless provides valuable information about the drug checking program operated by Insite in Vancouver. It reports that 80% of the drugs checked from July to September 2016 were positive for fentanyl. It also further supports the usefulness of drug checking in relating that overdoses were less common with drugs that had not tested as positive for fentanyl.

Implications: This communication provides a Canadian example of a drug checking service which proves to be both necessary and effective.

Link: <http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/drug-checks-at-vancouver-supervised-injection-site-found-80-contained-fentanyl>

Reference: Lysyshyn, M., Dohoo, C., Forsting, S., Kerr, T., & McNeil, R. (2017). *Evaluation of a fentanyl drug checking program for clients of a supervised injection site, Vancouver, Canada*. Paper presented at the HR17 Harm Reduction Conference, Montreal, Canada. <https://www.hri.global/conference-2017>

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- Sande, M., & Šabić, S. (2018). The importance of drug checking outside the context of nightlife in Slovenia. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 15(1), 2. doi:10.1186/s12954-018-0208-z