

THE WARREN ALPERT Medical School

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Drug Supply Monitoring: Feedback from People Who Use Drugs

Overview

- The overdose crisis is a critical public health issue in the U.S., with significant impacts in Rhode Island.
- In 2022, there were 107,941 drug overdose deaths nationwide, including 434 in Rhode Island.^{1,2}
- The emergence of potent synthetic opioids like fentanyl and novel psychoactive substances (NPS) such as xylazine and nitazenes poses additional challenges.³
- Understanding drug supply dynamics and their influence on use and health outcomes is crucial for developing effective public health interventions.

Aims

• This study aims to assess feedback from people who use drugs (PWUD) regarding dissemination of information, drug supply surveillance, and testing services. By evaluating PWUD feedback, this study seeks to improve drug checking services and inform public health responses.

Methods

- The testRI project is a two-year initiative to monitor the evolving opioid crisis at the street level in Rhode Island. The project employed a multidisciplinary approach, integrating ethnographic and toxicological methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the local drug supply and its implications for people who use drugs (PWUD).
- Survey participants were recruited through outreach efforts with community partners. For inclusion in the survey participants had to report active or recent drug use, defined as drug use within the last six months. The surveys included multiple choice questions on drug use practices, interest in drug testing or checking in various forms, and feedback on study materials, including presentation, content, and dissemination strategies. Additionally, participants were queried on perceptions of supply safety, preferences related to drug testing services, how results from drug testing might impact them, and preferences for receiving information about the local drug supply.
- Digital tools included a dedicated webpage and an email alert system, while physical dissemination focused on printed educational materials such as infographics and posters shared in community spaces like libraries, drop-in centers, and harm reduction facilities.
- A total of 158 individuals completed the survey.

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Results

Preferences for Information			
What format would you prefer to receive information in future? (check all that apply)	Participants (n=158)	% of Participants	
Drop in center	77	49	
Paper Printout	75	47	
Website	74	47	
Outreach worker	69	44	
Email	67	42	
Phone number I can call and talk about my results	65	41	
Social Media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook)	52	33	
Link with results texted to me	49	31	
Health care provider office	48	30	
Drawings, posters, or other visual methods	44	28	
Pharmacy	41	26	
Other	9	6	
None Selected	3	2	
What other information would be helpful to include with the testing results?	Participants (n=158)	% of Participants	
Local harm reduction resources	95	60	
How a substance works in the body	67	42	
Overdose risk	64	41	
What feelings to expect from using certain substances	63	40	
Adverse effects from supply contents other than overdose	61	39	
Other	7	4	
None Selected	4	3	

Sample Additional Feedback from Participants

"In a better world there would be drug checking stands on every corner."

"Please put in needle exchanges and all warming centers."

"Concerned about infection risk primarily."

"Make it more visible, everywhere you can put it on the bus, at the gas pumps."

"Maybe have a place that you can buy your drugs at that only sells purity with no harmful fillers and have a stipulation in having to use at a safe consumption site."

"This info is good! I have never heard about this resource so getting the information out to more people is important."

Drug Supply Safety Concerns			
What is your level of concern about drug supply safety?	Participants	% of Participants	
Very Concerned	74	48	
Concerned	36	23	
Somewhat concerned	14	9	
Neutral	22	14	
Not concerned at all	7	5	
Don't Know / Refuse	2	1	

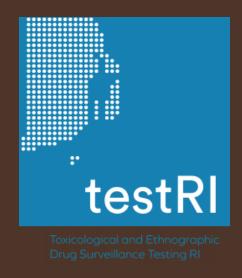
If availa Yes No Don't Kr Would Yes - bo Yes - xya Yes - be No Don't Kr lf you u interes Very inte

Interest Somew Neutral Not inte Don't kn



Amanda L A Mohr, Barry K Logan, Melissa F Fogarty, Alex J Krotulski, Donna M Papsun, Sherri L Kacinko, Marilyn A Huestis, Jeri D Ropero-Miller, Reports of Adverse Events Associated with Use of Novel Psychoactive Substances, 2017–2020: A Review, Journal of Analytical Toxicology, Volume 46, Issue 6, July 2022, Pages e116-e185, https://doi.org/10.1093/jat/bkac023

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Interest in Harm Reduction Services				
able, would you be interested in using fentanyl test strips?	Participants	% of Participants		
	124	79		
	23	15		
now / Refuse	8	5		
you be interested in using xyalzine or benzodiazapine test strips?	Participants	% of Participants		
oth	115	74		
alzine only	5	5		
enzo only	0	0		
	23	15		
now / Refuse	12	8		
ise drugs and drug checking services were available, how				
sted would you be in checking your drugs prior to use?	Participants	% of Participants		
terested	95	61		
ted	28	18		
/hat interested	8	5		
l	11	7		
erested at all	9	6		
now	5	3		

Conclusions

• The survey results indicate that there is a significant concern among respondents regarding drug supply safety, with a majority expressing a high level of interest in using drug-checking services and test strips for substances like fentanyl and xylazine.

• A key takeaway was the positive reception of printed materials and drop-in centers compared to digital approaches, particularly for disseminating results. Although digital platforms, such as the state website and email listserv, were initially prioritized, many participants found printed resources more effective. This underscores the need for greater emphasis on tangible materials in future efforts to address barriers to digital access, such as limited internet connectivity and lack of devices.

Limitations: It is important to note that the surveys were primarily conducted with individuals already connected to harm reduction resources, which may have influenced their responses. Future research should aim to reach a more diverse population, including those less engaged with these services, to identify additional gaps and expand the reach of interventions.

• In summary, this project underscores the importance of a multifaceted approach that goes beyond drug testing to include robust community engagement, clear and comprehensive educational materials, and ongoing dialogue with those most affected by drug use. Future initiatives should integrate these elements to maximize their impact and address the broader concerns of the community regarding health and safety.

References

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