

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.

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

Interest in Harm Reduction Services		
If available, would you be interested in using fentanyl test strips?	Participants	% of Participants
Yes	124	79
No	23	15
Don't Know / Refuse	8	5
Would you be interested in using xylazine or benzodiazapine test strips?	Participants	% of Participants
Yes - both	115	74
Yes - xylazine only	5	5
Yes - benzo only	0	0
No	23	15
Don't Know / Refuse	12	8
If you use drugs and drug checking services were available, how interested would you be in checking your drugs prior to use?	Participants	% of Participants
Very interested	95	61
Interested	28	18
Somewhat interested	8	5
Neutral	11	7
Not interested at all	9	6
Don't know	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

- Spencer MR, Garnett MF, Miniño AM. Drug overdose deaths in the United States, 2002–2022. NCHS Data Brief, no 491. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2024. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc.135849>
- Rhode Island Department of Health. (2023, June 14). *Rhode Island 2022 fatal drug overdose data released*. RI.gov. <https://www.ri.gov/press/view/45859>
- 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>