

## Selkirk Drug Checking Pilot

### Background

The Manitoba Harm Reduction Network (MHRN) is a provincial harm reduction advocacy, education, and research organization in Manitoba. The mandate of the MHRN is to work with peers, network members, policymakers, academics, and community leaders to make recommendations regarding the development, implementation, and evaluation of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection prevention initiatives based on evidence and harm reduction.

The Selkirk Peer Advisory Council is one of the advisory bodies of the MHRN. The members of the group are people who use drugs and are impacted by HIV, hepatitis C, and are actively involved in preventing the transmission of STBBI in their communities through harm reduction. The Peer Advisory Councils inform the organization on issues related to safer drug use, safer sex practices, harm reduction strategies, peer engagement strategies and tools, community based research, program development and implementation, knowledge translation, and support for individuals affected by STBBI, the social determinants of health, and substance use.

The WRHA highlights our shifting drug use landscape that demands a swift response to increasing the safety of people who use drugs:

*Winnipeg's drug use landscape is rapidly shifting with the emergence of bootleg fentanyl analogues increasing fatal and non-fatal opioid overdose (MHSAL, 2018).*

In response to this need, and peer request, the MHRN hosted a drug checking workshop in Selkirk with the Peer Advisory Council. After the training, the peers expressed a strong desire to use the kits to check their drugs and help keep their communities safe. Peers also requested a staff member be available to do drug checking, as the process is sometimes difficult to evaluate. Following this the MHRN planned this project to equip members of the Selkirk Peer Advisory Council with supplies necessary to check their drugs for adulterants as an overdose prevention strategy.

## Partnership

This project represents a partnership between the following groups:

- Manitoba Harm Reduction Network: coordinating the project
- Selkirk Peer Advisory Council: executing the project
- Do It Better, Do It Safer Network: supporting the project
- IERHA: in-kind space for meetings and staff testing
- Project Safe Audience: review and provide guidance for procedures, drug checking training.

## Results

On November 21st, 2019, 5 peers and 3 staff met with a volunteer from Project Safe Audience to do drug checking training and kits. Kits included reagents and fentanyl check strips. The MHRN Selkirk Network Coordinator and Public Health Staff also offered drug checking during office hours through the harm reduction supply distribution site. Each check done included a data sheet to track expected substance, actual substance, and any changes in use as well as basic demographics. Peers and staff were trained and equipped with a procedure adapted from ANCHOR (<http://michelow.ca/drug-checking-guide/>). Drug checking kits, including forms were distributed to each volunteer. Very few forms were returned so on March 3rd, 2020 MHRN conducted a brief discussion at the end of a regular Peer Advisory meeting.

In the discussion one peer said they had done about 25 tests, for themselves and their friends using the kit. No other peers had been using theirs. Barriers to using the kits were that it is more applicable to party drugs, not as useful for cocaine/crack, and that filling out forms 'sketched out' their peers. Peers expressed that the fentanyl test strips are easier to use and should be offered to heroin and down users, as opposed to complete drug checking kits. Peers also expressed that the drug checking kits are more useful to younger folks that use more diverse drugs, and that peers using cocaine/crack who have been using for longer are more resistant to drug

checking. After discussion the peers recommended the following: continue to have drug checking available by staff, offer fentanyl test strips to people using down, explore more accessible drug checking technologies.

## Testing Procedure

Involve the person wanting a test as an equal participant in observing and interpreting the result.

**IMPORTANT: Never touch the drugs or the sample**  
**Person wanting test puts the sample on the plate.**

1. Mandatory check: **Have you read the disclaimer?**
  - Do you understand what it means?
  - Do you have any questions about it?
2. Test Tracking Form: **write down** the believed substance or purpose of test
3. Check: **Gloves? Clean plate?**
4. Person takes the sample (tester does not take or touch the sample)
  - Powder: Use a stir stick to make 4 piles the size of pinheads
  - Pill: use the scraper to scrape off a sample and make 4 piles the size of pinheads
  - **Check:** samples are spaced far apart so reagents dont mix
  - Single use ampule: have person place sample directly in the ampule
5. Colour Chart: Show the person the colour chart
  - Point out what colour you are looking for as a positive
  - Point out the timeline to check results (0-20sec)
6. Test 1: Chose the test best suited for the believed substance
  - Drop 1 drop of reagent onto 1 sample pile
7. Test ++: Use other tests each on a separate sample to cross reference
8. Fentanyl Test strip:
  - Person mixes sample with water and puts in container
  - Dip in test strip and share result
9. **Test Tracking Form:** Record tests used and results obtained

### MANDATORY

Positive Test Result---> Harm Reduction Checklist for drug (cards)

- Dosing strategy- start small and take it easy
- Potential risks
- Safety tips

Reset: Clean plate and fentanyl test container