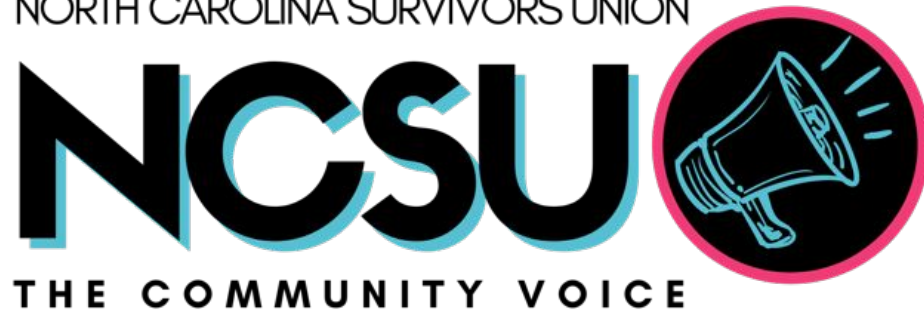


Drug Checking in North Carolina

NORTH CAROLINA SURVIVORS UNION



Opioid Data Lab



What are the benefits of drug checking?

FTIR and GCMS are necessary tools to **expand our knowledge** beyond what fentanyl test strips tell us.

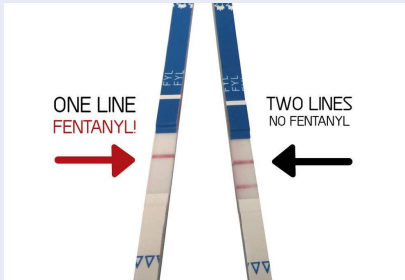
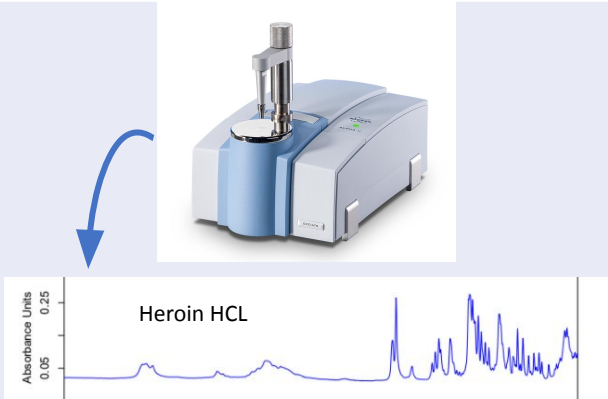
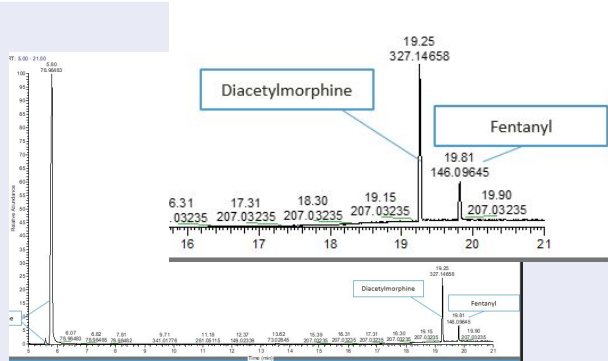
Studies have shown that drug checking encourages **safer drug use practices**.^{1,2}

People who use drugs can adjust drug use behaviors, make informed decisions about their health, and implement harm reduction practices.

1. Peiper N, et al. Fentanyl test strips as an opioid overdose prevention strategy: findings from a syringe services program in the Southeastern United States. *Int J Drug Policy*. 2019;63:122-128.

2. Measham F. City checking: Piloting the UK's first community-based drug safety testing (drug checking) service in 2 city centres. *Br J Clin Pharmacol*. 2020;86(3):420-428.



	Fentanyl Test Strips (FTS)	Fourier-Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR)	Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (GC-MS)
What does it tell us?	Presence/absence of fentanyl	Presence of thousands of different substances, including fentanyl	Chemical formulation confirmation of opioids, byproducts, and fillers
Benefits	Inexpensive, easy to use, quick turnaround for testing	Comprehensive range of substances, quick turnaround for testing	Extremely wide range of substance detection, much more sensitive analysis.
Limitations	Testing is limited to fentanyl detection, false positives	Reliability of results, FTIR machine is expensive but has little to no ongoing costs once purchased, requires training of the operator	Expensive, not as timely
What does it look like?			 <p>Source: UNC Mass Spec Lab</p>

Our Guiding Principles


Drug checking is a **service** for people who use drugs.

The approach is **centered in public health and harm reduction**.

It helps **monitor the drug supply** on a community level.

ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

Drug Checking for Novel Insights into the Unregulated Drug Supply

Nabarun Dasgupta , Mary C Figgatt

American Journal of Epidemiology, kwab233, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwab233>

Published: 15 September 2021 **Article history** ▼



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Drug Checking with FTS

Conclusions of Study at NCSU.

Research with RTI and Jon Zibbell:

Test shots
Pushing Slower
Snorting instead of Injecting

Found that using FTS and receiving a positive test result was associated with ***changes in drug use behavior and perceptions of overdose safety***. FTS may represent an effective addition to current overdose prevention efforts when included with other evidence-based strategies to prevent opioid overdose and related harm.

Peiper NC, Clarke SD, Vincent LB, Ciccarone D, Kral AH, Zibbel JE. Fentanyl test strips as an opioid overdose prevention strategy: Findings from a syringe services program in the Southeastern United States. International Journal of Drug Policy. 2019; 63: 122-128.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0955395918302135>

NC Survivors Union:

Getting Ready to Expand Drug Checking Services

- **The Opioid Response Act:** Allowed for drug checking materials, including fentanyl test strips.
- **Create a Team:** We were determined to have a staff member of NC Survivors Union part of the FTIR team so no one could ever say that drug users can't operate a drug checking program.
- **Assess our legal standing and develop relationships:** outreach to the District Attorney
- **Purchased the FTIR Machine:** had little understanding of how intense the training and work would be to get up and running.
- **Secure the office and the FTIR Machine:** Purchased a double fire door, put two deadbolts on the door, had to get a large dehumidifier to ensure the well being of the machine - need for passing performance test.
- **Protect our participants,** the FTIR Machine and NC Survivors Union; spread the word about the service to our participants.
- **Develop a protocol** and learn how other programs work (protocol, legal considerations and liabilities).

Meet Nan: the Drug Checking Machine



What can drug checking identify?

- Active ingredients: heroin, fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, methamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA
- Inactive ingredients: sugars, caffeine
- Adulterants: **xylazine**, phenacetin, levamisole ...and **thousands** other substances!



Nabarun Dasgupta
@nabarund


...

Xylazine, a veterinary tranquilizer, is showing up in heroin and other dope today.



xylazine is NOT levamisole



Pay attention, this is something different. A brief  timeline below by [@mary_figgatt](#) [@UNCpublichealth](#) [@UNC_IPRC](#)

10:29 AM · Mar 25, 2021 · Twitter Web App

Results are usually what we expect...
But sometimes we find unusual things.

This is often explained by ***subjective experiences***.

Participant's Subjective Experience	Drug Checking Results
Unexpected hallucinogenic experience from heroin.	Fentanyl, heroin, tenocyclidine (PCP analogue), and other cuts.
Small amount of heroin caused unusual reaction with deep sedation.	Fentanyl, heroin, xylazine , and sugars.



Keys to Success

- Leading through **both** lived experience of drug use and science
- Having a collaborative team
- Respecting our people and team members



POLITICS + LEGALIZATION

USE + HARM REDUCTION

INTERSECTIONS + INJUSTICE

DRUGS + MONEY

MEDIA + CULTURE

I Hid My Wounds for Months and Nearly Lost My Life: Stigma Kills Drug Users



BY LOUISE VINCENT MARCH 30, 2021



Drug-testing equipment saved my life. We have a treacherous drug supply with deadly poison mixed in. I am the leader of a drug-user union. If *I* can die from our poisoned drug supply, so can anyone. We must act now to get the safe supply and resources that we need. We must not be silent, ashamed or scared. We must talk, even if we are hated. We must scream, if that is what it takes.

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Acknowledgements: Louise Vincent, Nabarun Dasgupta, Nan Goldin, the amazing people of the ACDC Group, and many more