

PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH SNAPSHOT



INSIDE BRITISH COLUMBIA'S STREET OPIOID SUPPLY

2021–2023 Drug Checking Data Reveal Dangerous Shifts

OBJECTIVES

Identify what substances are in unregulated opioids in B.C.

Track how often fentanyl, analogues, and benzodiazepines appear

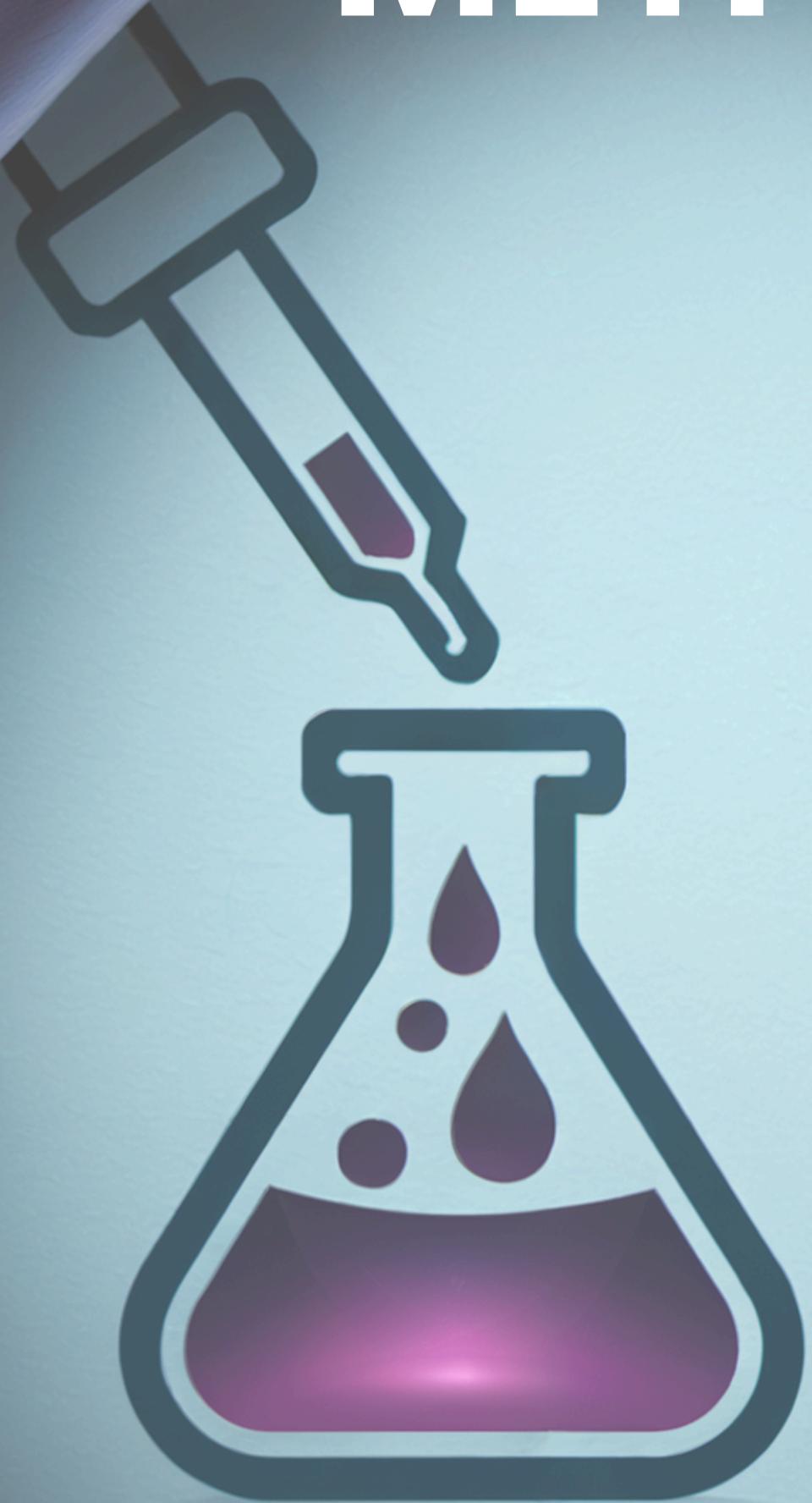
Measure drug strength and see how it changes over time

Show how local drug checking can inform public health and safety

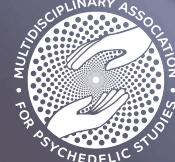


MAPS
CANADA

METHODS



- **Location:**
Victoria, B.C.
- **Timeline:**
January 2021 – December 2023
- **Samples submitted:**
8,122 suspected opioids
- **Technologies:**
Paper-Spray Mass Spectrometry (PS-MS)
Fourier-Transform Infrared (FTIR)
Immunoassay strips



KEY FINDINGS

88%

CONTAINED
FENTANYL OR
ANALOGUES

HEROIN
DETECTED
IN ONLY
4%

49%

CONTAINED
BENZODIAZEPINES

FLUOROFENTANYL
NOW FOUND IN
70%

WHAT WAS
FOUND IN THE
SAMPLES



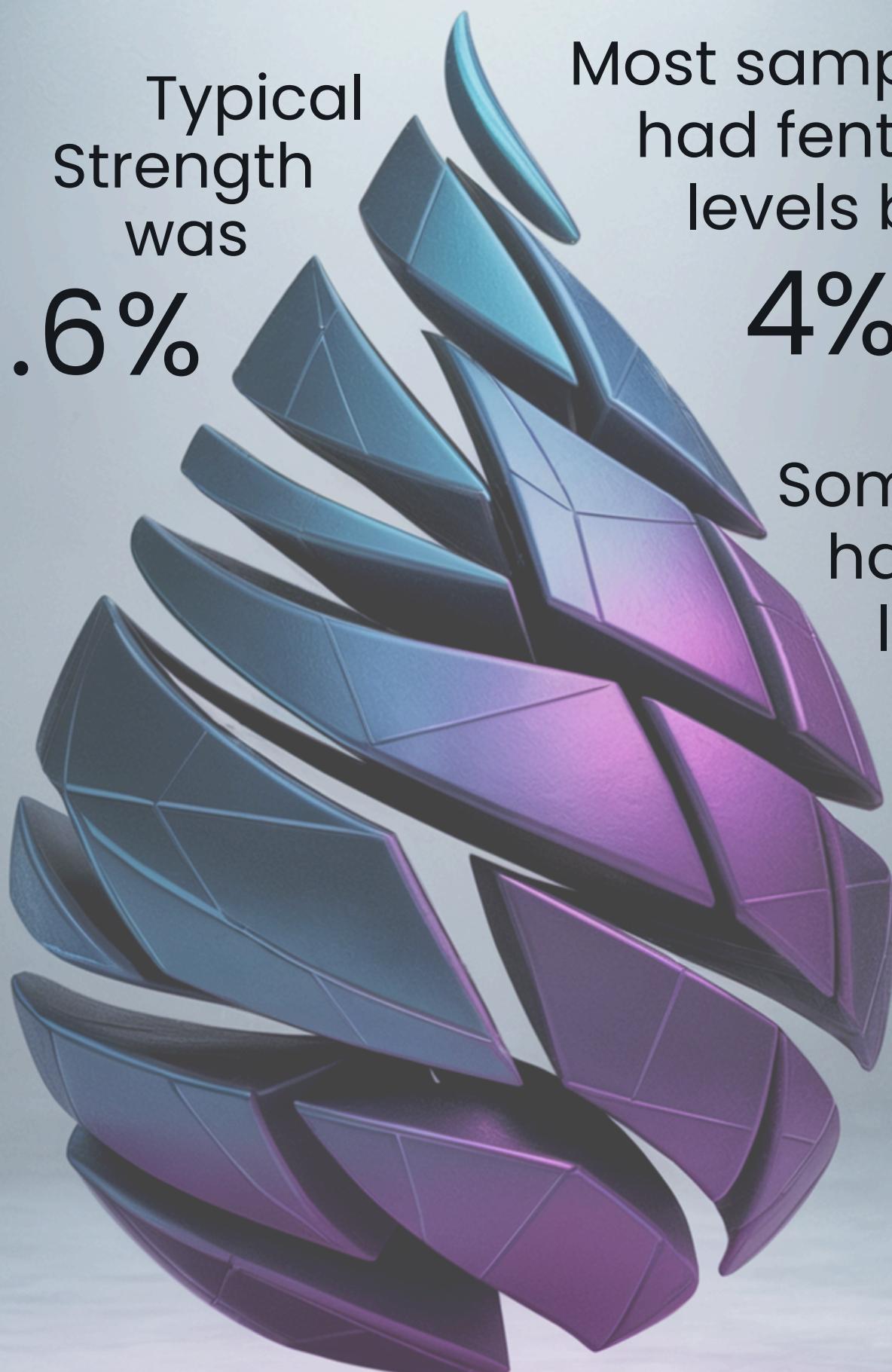
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KEY FINDINGS

Typical
Strength
was
10.6%

Most samples
had fentanyl
levels between
4%-19%

Some samples
had fentanyl
levels of
80%

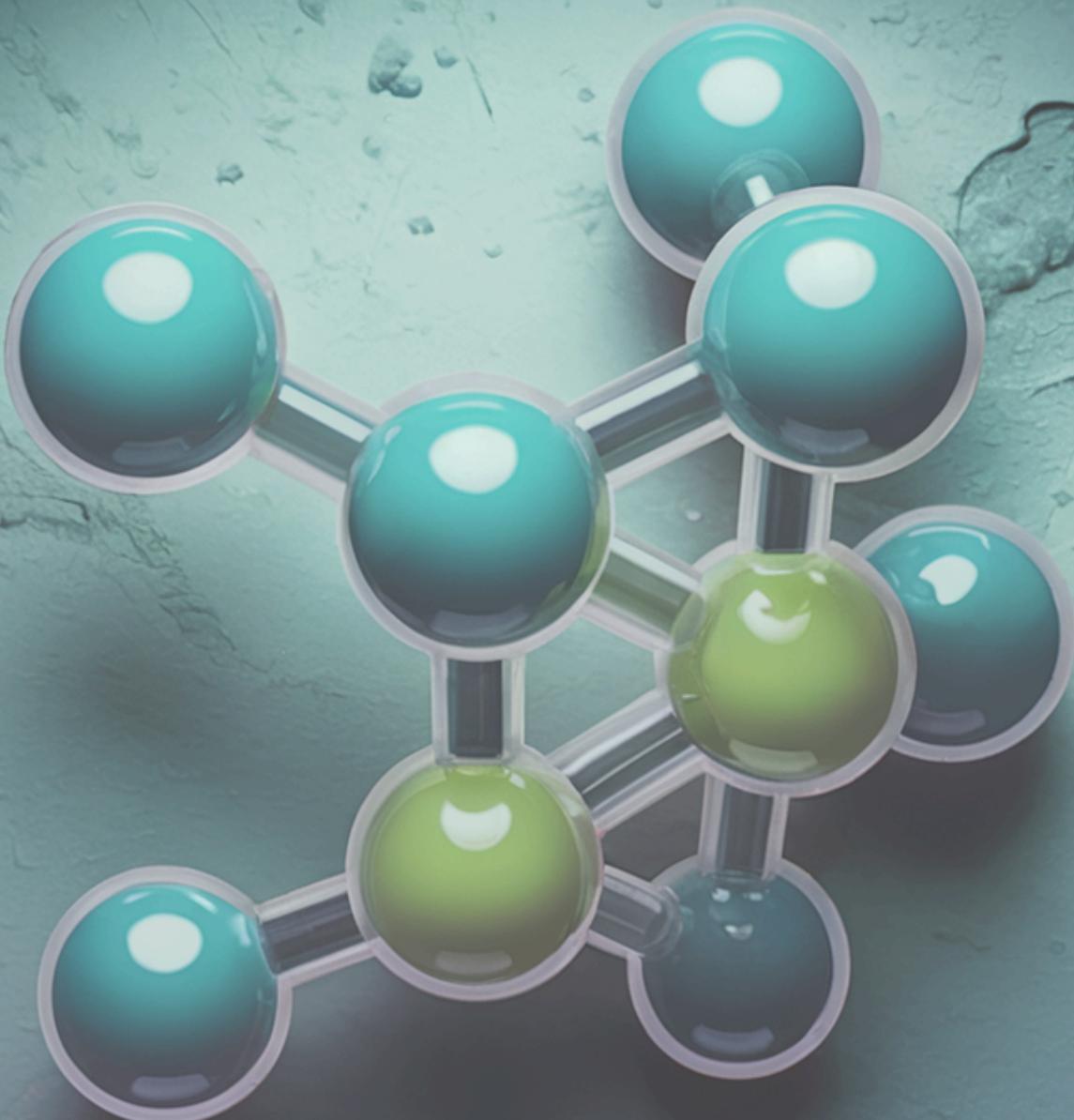


HOW STRONG WAS THE FENTANYL?



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KEY FINDINGS



Fluorofentanyl: A potent new addition

- Was rare in 2021
- Found in 70% of samples in 2023
- Sometimes the only opioid present
- Other times mixed with fentanyl

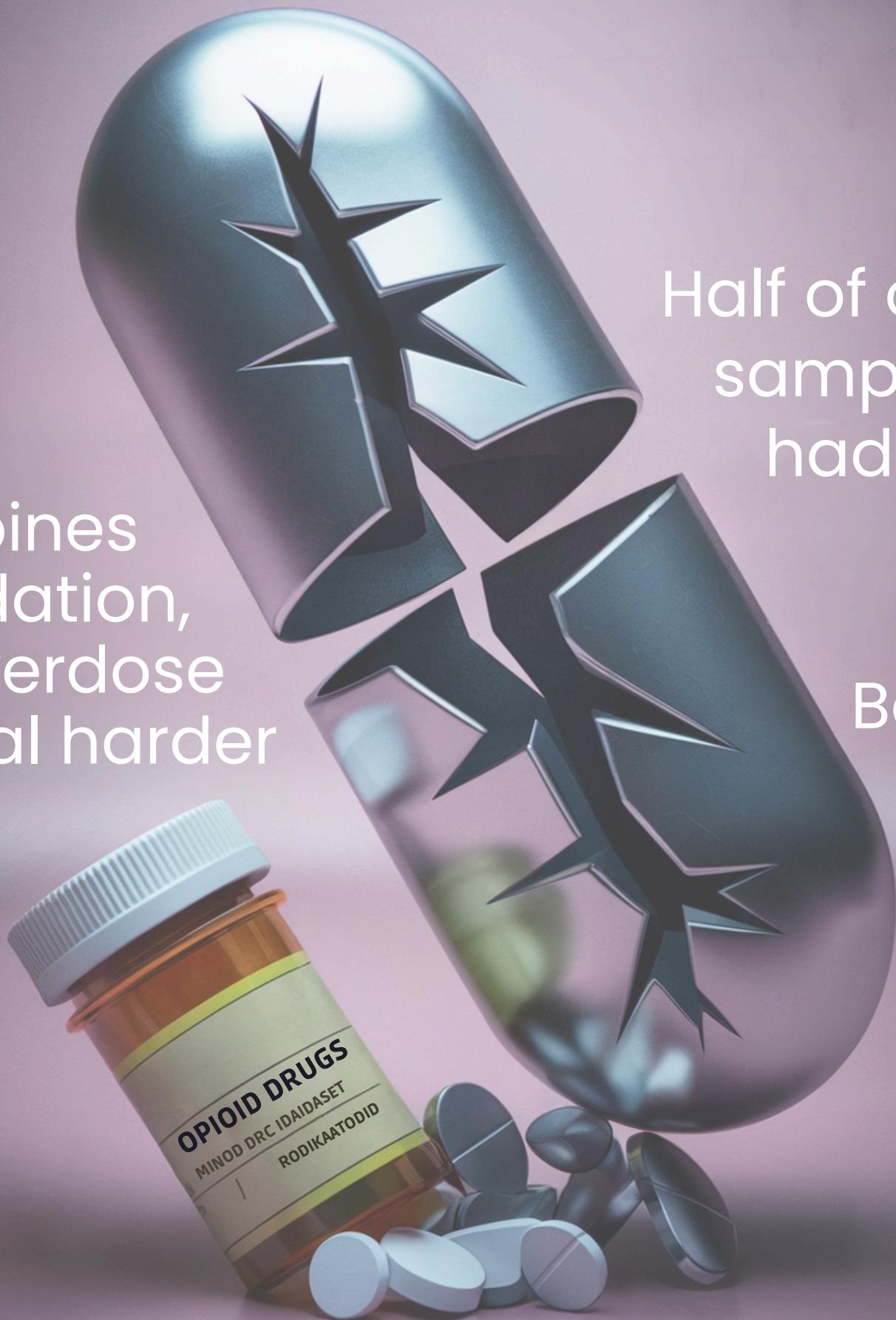


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KEY FINDINGS

BENZODIAZEPINES

Benzodiazepines
prolong sedation,
making overdose
reversal harder



Half of opioid
samples also
had benzos

Benzos don't
respond to
naloxone

WHY THIS MATTERS



- **People can't tell strength by look or taste**
- **Drug checking can detect what's in the supply**
- **Stronger drugs = higher overdose risk**
- **Unpredictable drug mixes raise overdose risks**
- **Naloxone may not work on all substances**
- **Real-time data helps public health respond quickly**



MAPS
CANADA



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WHAT WE LEARNED

- Street opioids in B.C. are complex and dangerous
- New drugs like fluorofentanyl and bromazolam are rising
- Many overdoses involve multiple drugs
- Local drug checking is key to tracking changes, saving lives, and guiding safer supply programs



REFERENCE

Not just fentanyl: Understanding the complexities of the unregulated opioid supply through results from a drug checking service in British Columbia, Canada

Gonzalez-Nieto, P., Wallace, B., Kielty, C., et al.
(2025)

International Journal of Drug Policy, 138, 104751

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2025.104751>



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