



**Amherst Police
Department**
Serving the Town of Amherst

21 Havelock Street, Amherst Nova Scotia



**Cumberland
Homelessness &
Housing Support
Association**

Cornerstone
*Serving the residents of
Cumberland County*

10 Prince Arthur Street, Amherst Nova Scotia



**HOMELESSNESS – IS
THIS A NEW PROBLEM?**

Over the last 3-4 years, homelessness issues have become a grave concern and topic of discussion. While we have always had a homelessness problem in our community, since the pandemic, the problem has increased dramatically not only in our town but across the country. We see some of the evidence every day. It is not just about people ‘couch surfing’ as the evidence is more visible than ever



**PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS
FACE SOME OF THE HIGHEST RATES OF
ILLNESS AND MORTALITY IN CANADA**

**Evidence has shown that even
a modest 25 percent reduction
in homelessness could prevent
nearly 2,000 opioid overdose
deaths, 850 cases of alcohol
poisoning, and 540 cocaine
overdoses.**

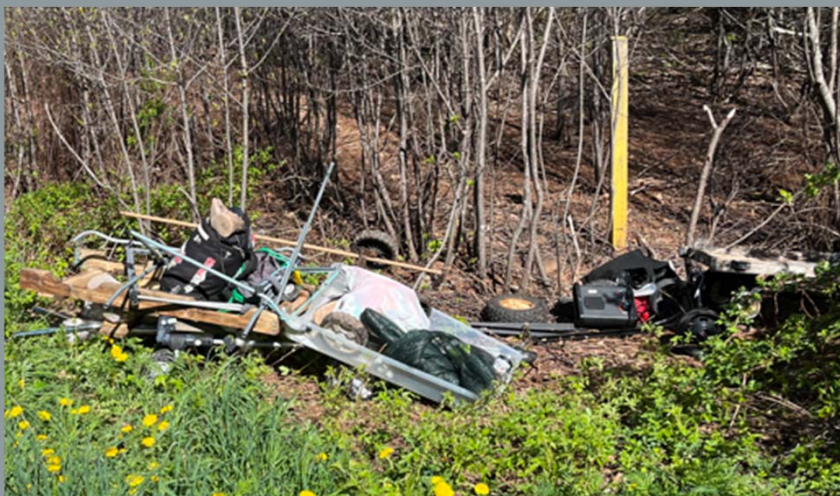
DP1



Homelessness – Is this a new problem? Then vs Now



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Slide 4

DP1

Dwayne Pike, 2022-11-07



**HOMELESSNESS
IS THIS A NEW
PROBLEM?**

Since 2022, our Department started tracking files that have an association with ‘homelessness’

It is very important to remember that police contact with homeless people is not necessarily the norm. Police often deal with the smaller percentage of homeless people who have struggles that may be related to mental illness, substance use disorder or trauma. In this way, homelessness is a very complex social problem that the police, who are often the agency of last resort and one of the few 24/7 resources, are left to deal with

HOMELESSNESS

IS THIS A NEW PROBLEM?

Police may come into contact with some homeless people as a result of complaints that include:

- Trespassing
- Causing a disturbance
- Tenting/Occupying private or town property
- Damage to property, littering
- Thefts
- Requests for assistance
 - Drives to the hospital
 - Assistance with meals
 - People looking for lodging
 - Well-being checks



HOMELESSNESS – IS THIS A NEW PROBLEM?

In August 2022, homelessness files peaked, and we had 140 complaints of our 683 had a connection to the homelessness situation;

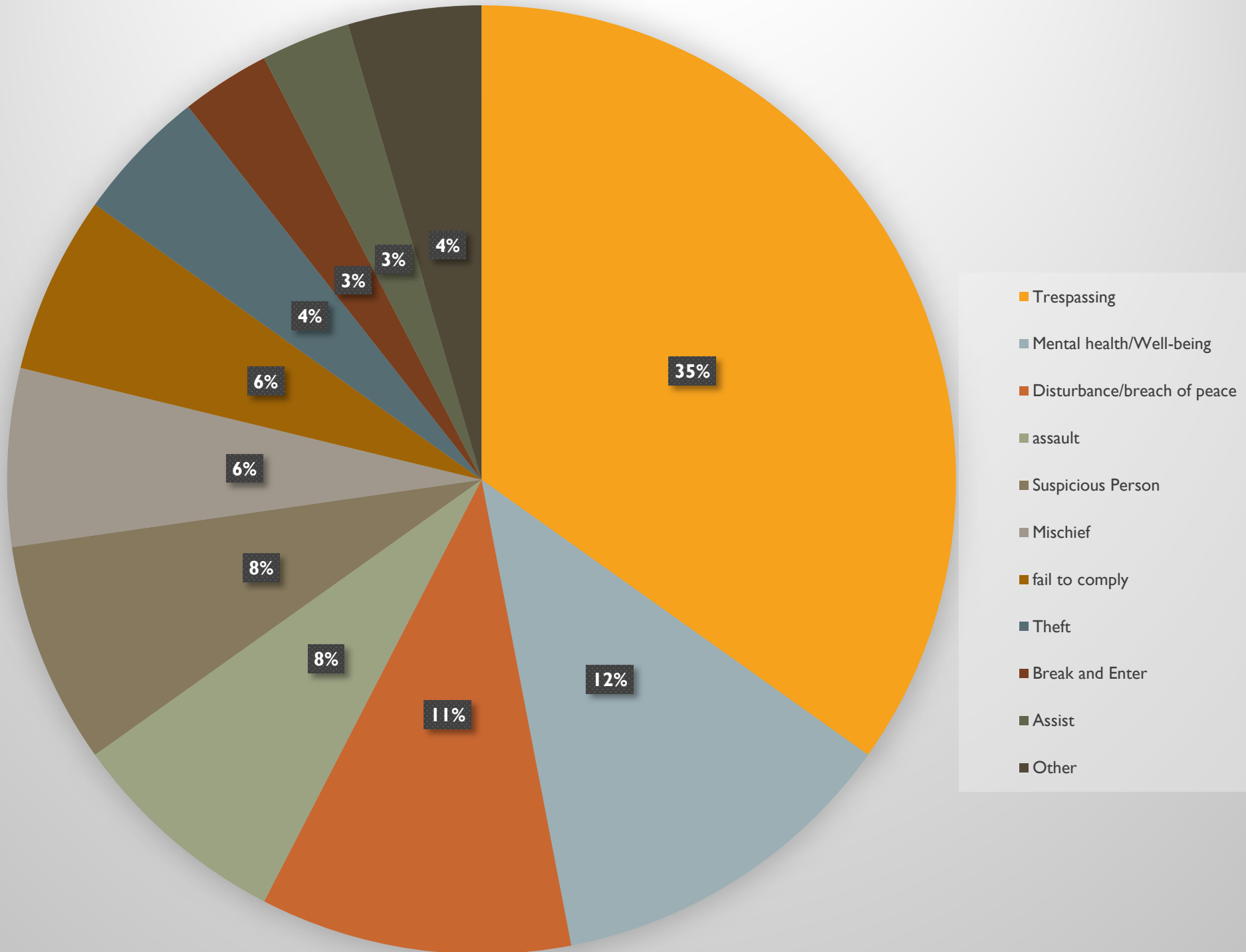
More recent stats have dropped off considerably, especially since the homeless shelter was erected.

Police no longer get many of the requests for assistance that we did in 2022 and 2023.

In November 2023, our stats fell to 7 of 439 occurrences. Since that time, they have steadily climbed. In May of 2024, we had 70 of 624.



Homelessness Compliant May 2024- Breakdown



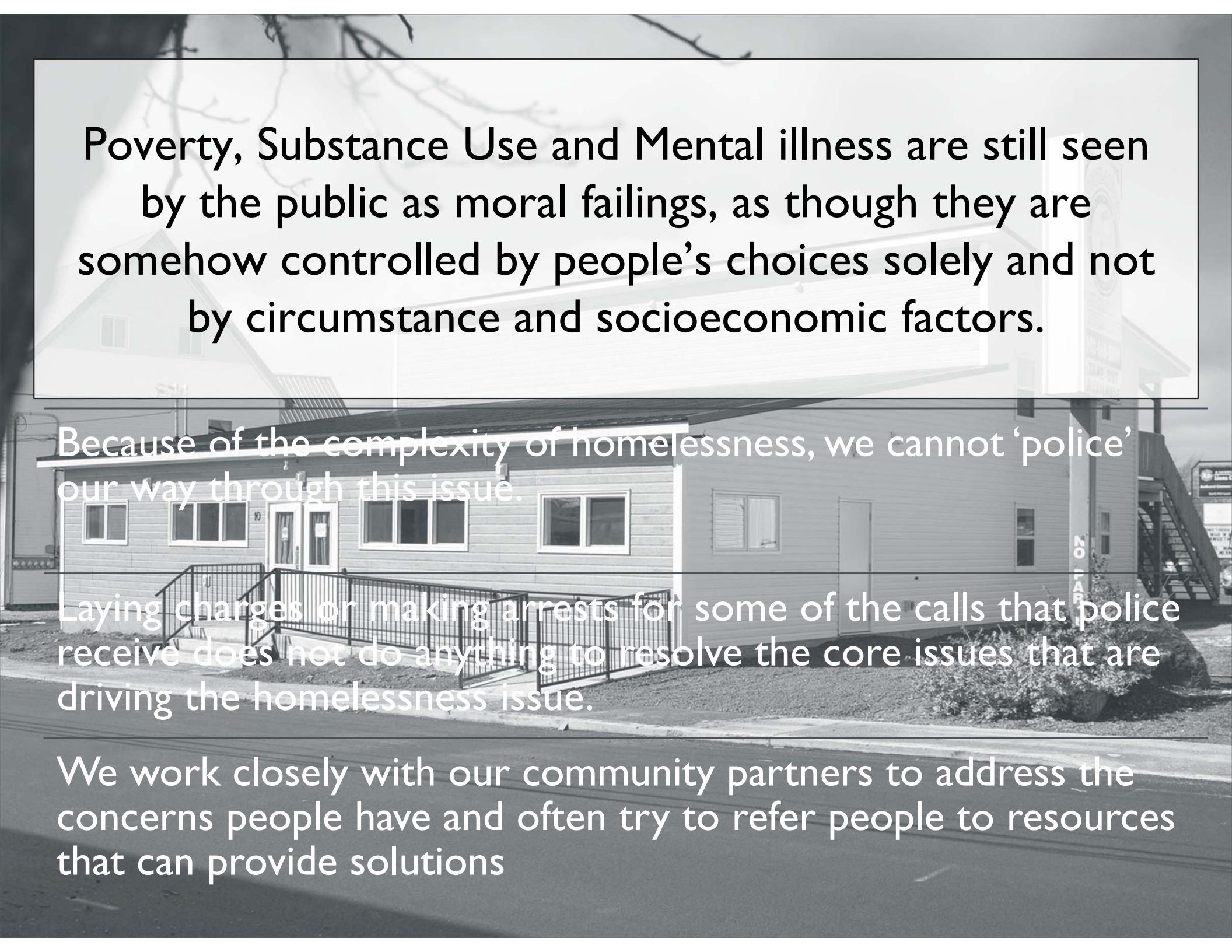
HOMELESSNESS

IS THIS A NEW PROBLEM?

- **IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT:**
 - **Our stats are based on police contact with persons who are homeless and may not accurately affect the real scope of the problem**
 - **Often stats may be driven by repeated contact or calls for service relating to a *small* number of people**
 - **These stats do not capture people who are precariously housed or who may be on the verge of being homeless**



**Cumberland
Homelessness &
Housing Support
Association**

A black and white photograph of a modern, single-story apartment building. The building has a light-colored exterior with horizontal siding and several windows. A ramp with a metal railing leads to the entrance. To the right, a sign on the building reads 'NOTARY'. In the background, there are trees and a street with a sign for 'AMERICAN BANK'.

Poverty, Substance Use and Mental illness are still seen by the public as moral failings, as though they are somehow controlled by people's choices solely and not by circumstance and socioeconomic factors.

Because of the complexity of homelessness, we cannot 'police' our way through this issue.

Laying charges or making arrests for some of the calls that police receive does not do anything to resolve the core issues that are driving the homelessness issue.

We work closely with our community partners to address the concerns people have and often try to refer people to resources that can provide solutions

WE NEED TO GUARD OURSELVES AGAINST THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS



Our Crime Prevention Coordinator often acts as a point of contact between these and other support agencies that facilitate 'intakes' and assists with seeking resources and support based on individual situations. With Cornerstone in our community, these requests have become less and less over time.

We prefer to 'negotiate' when dealing with issues, being patient and understanding, but when we do take enforcement action, we need to keep in mind that homelessness in and of itself is not a crime, that many people who are homeless are desperate and are looking for ways to get by, just to survive.

A photograph of a person lying on a cardboard box on a sidewalk next to a brick wall. The person is wearing a white hoodie and dark pants. The background shows a brick wall and a building entrance.

When a person finds themselves homeless, when their basic needs of food, shelter, safety and security are not being met, people can experience:

Psychological distress

Social exclusion and loneliness

Fear and anxiety

Health issues

Loss of self-worth and depression

Increased propensity to substance abuse

Increased tendencies towards violence

Increased risk of incarceration

Increased victimization – assaults, sexual assaults, thefts, etc

These can be overwhelming and result in a downward spiral that is nearly impossible without strong and consistent community and health support.

Mental health and substance use will both suffer when people are at risk of or are homeless, but they do not always co-exist.

- A single issue does not cause homelessness but is the result of a combination of factors that can include:

- Poverty
- Unemployment and/or precarious employment
- Lack of affordable or suitable housing
- lack or shortage of community support in the areas of health and social welfare
- Substance-use disorder
- Mental illness and related issues
- Discrimination (of all kinds)
- Health problems

Negative consequences associated with substance use, such as poor mental and physical health, can be amplified when combined with homelessness or the risk of homelessness, but one does not create the other.

HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA AND AT HOME

The annual number of homeless individuals in Canada – 150,000 – 300,000

Halifax homeless population – 1326

Amherst – 49*

*new data to be released this fall



HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT BY THE METRICS IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY

Since May 2023, CHHSA has served 22,778 meals. We serve more meals to those housed than unhoused.

This way we are able to help those experiencing food insecurity not have to choose between food and rent.

We have assisted in getting 35 individuals housed in our community. 29 in private market and 6 in our supportive housing units

We have helped 23 individuals enter treatment programs for substance use disorder.

We supported 2 individuals to reunite with their families and move back into their family homes

CHHSA staff assisted 11 individuals reentering the workforce



Homelessness and Substance Use

The facts



Almost half of those who reported substance use as a reason for their most recent housing loss had their first experienced homelessness in their youth (49.5%)



7.3% of people who said their homelessness was a result of their substance experienced homelessness as a child (aged between 0 and 12 years old)



It is safe to say that Adverse Childhood Experiences contribute to homelessness more than substance use does. We need to ask why the trauma, not why the drugs.

A narrow street with brick buildings and a cobblestone path. The street is flanked by multi-story brick buildings. The ground is paved with cobblestones. A street lamp is visible on the right side of the street. The sky is overcast.

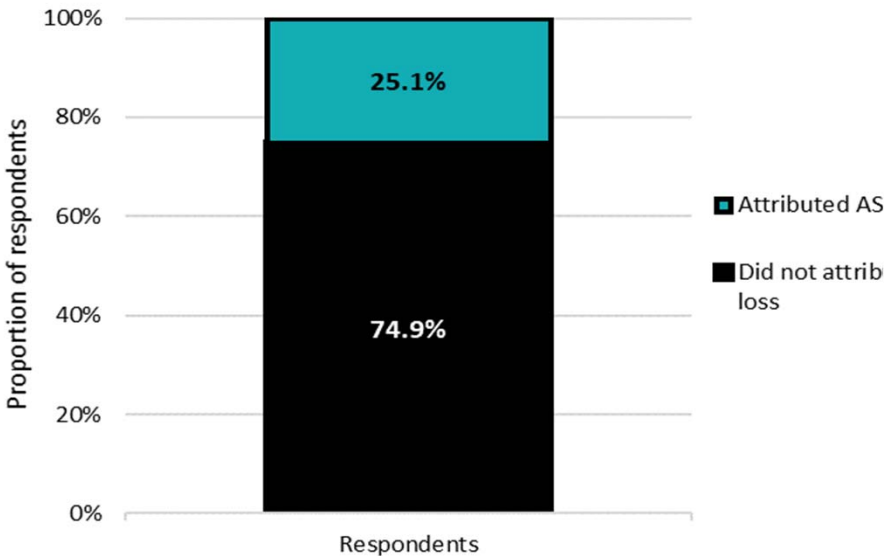
XYLAZINE, FENTANYL & METHAMPHETAMINE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND WHY THIS ISN'T EXPLICITLY RELATED TO HOMELESSNESS

What are the trends

Where is the data coming
from

How it affects our whole
community

ONLY 25.1% OF PEOPLE IN CANADA WHO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS LOST THEIR HOMES DUE TO THEIR SUBSTANCE USE



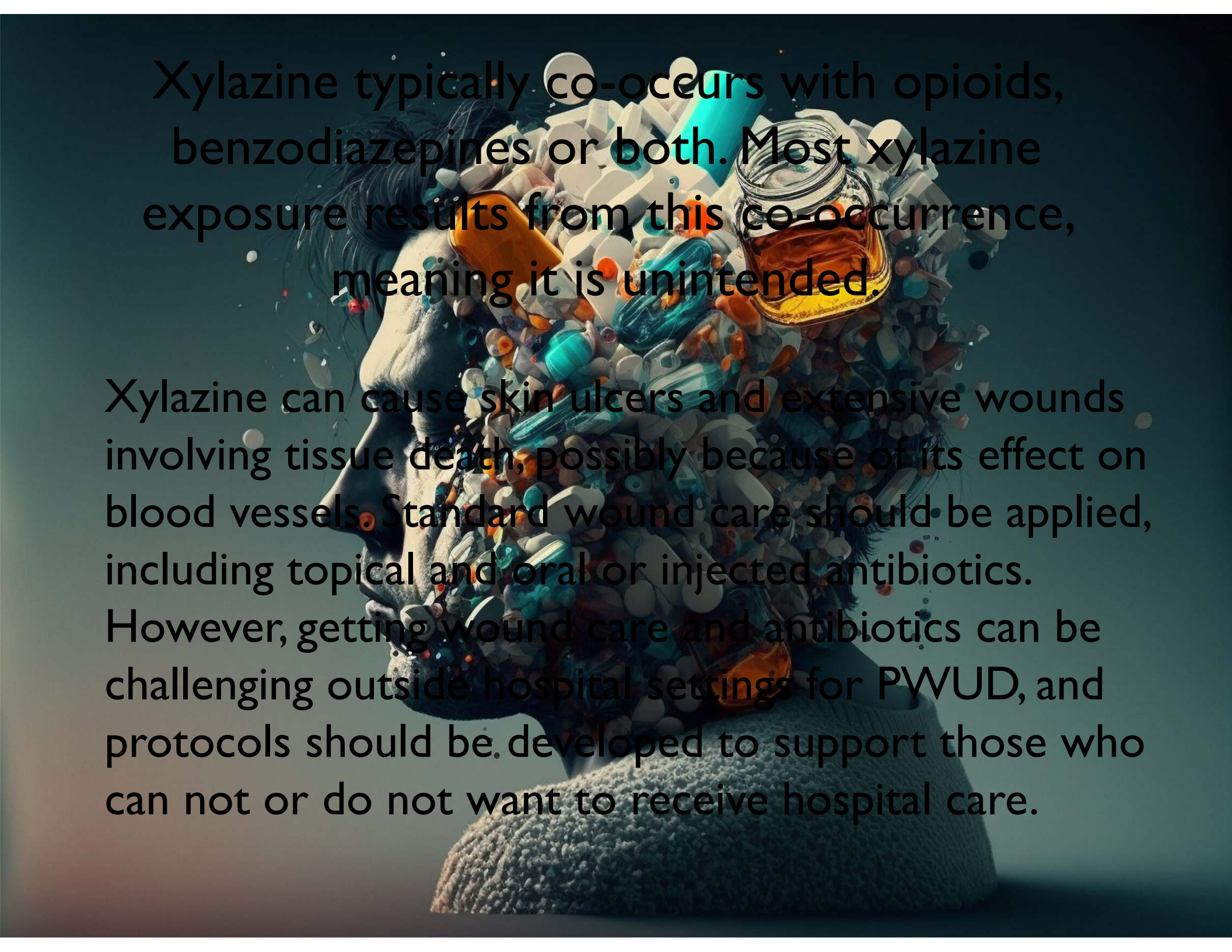
What is xylazine?

Xylazine, a veterinary sedative with effects similar to the depressant benzodiazepine, was identified in a Health Canada report in 2022 as an emerging additive to illegally sold opioids. The drug is added to the mix to “increase bulk and enhance or mimic the effects of other illicit drugs

Xylazine is just one of the many dangerous additives being found in the illicit drug supply.

79% of exhibits containing Xylazine contained two to four other substances

It affects the skin and causes horrific skin infections. Infections can go very deep, can lead to amputation, and are hard to heal.

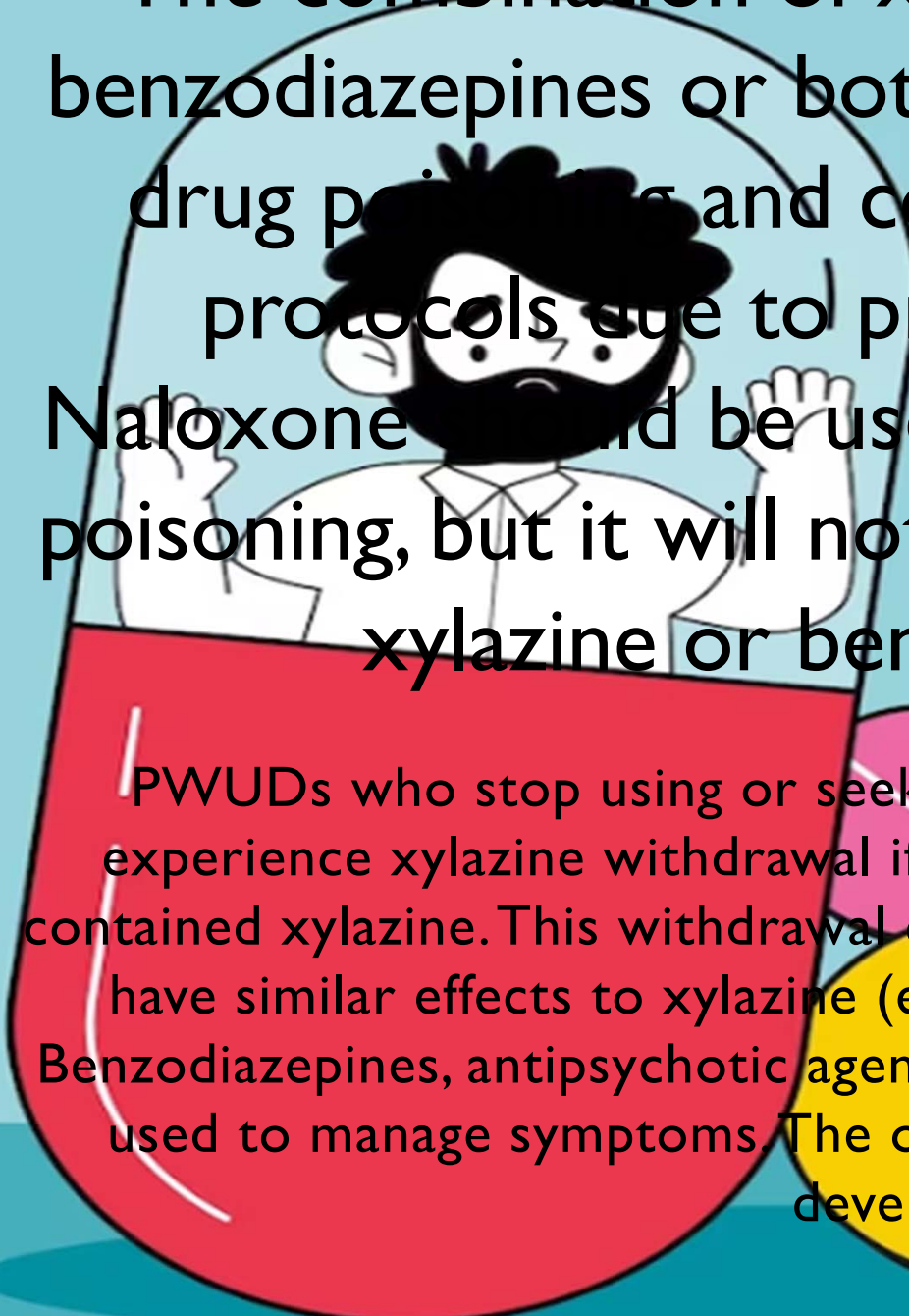
A conceptual image showing a person's head profile filled with a dense collection of various pills, capsules, and a glass of orange liquid, symbolizing drug use or addiction.

Xylazine typically co-occurs with opioids, benzodiazepines or both. Most xylazine exposure results from this co-occurrence, meaning it is unintended.

Xylazine can cause skin ulcers and extensive wounds involving tissue death, possibly because of its effect on blood vessels. Standard wound care should be applied, including topical and oral or injected antibiotics. However, getting wound care and antibiotics can be challenging outside hospital settings for PWUD, and protocols should be developed to support those who can not or do not want to receive hospital care.

The combination of xylazine with opioids, benzodiazepines or both increases the risk of drug poisoning and complicates response protocols due to prolonged sedation. Naloxone should be used in suspected opioid poisoning, but it will not reverse the effects of xylazine or benzodiazepines.

PWUDs who stop using or seek treatment for opioid use could experience xylazine withdrawal if the opioids they were using also contained xylazine. This withdrawal can be treated with medications that have similar effects to xylazine (e.g., clonidine, dexmedetomidine). Benzodiazepines, antipsychotic agents and phenobarbital have also been used to manage symptoms. The optimal approach still needs to be developed.



Xylazine is increasingly present in the unregulated opioid supply. The proportion of fentanyl samples that also contained xylazine increased from 1.4% in January 2020 to 9.0% in April 2023



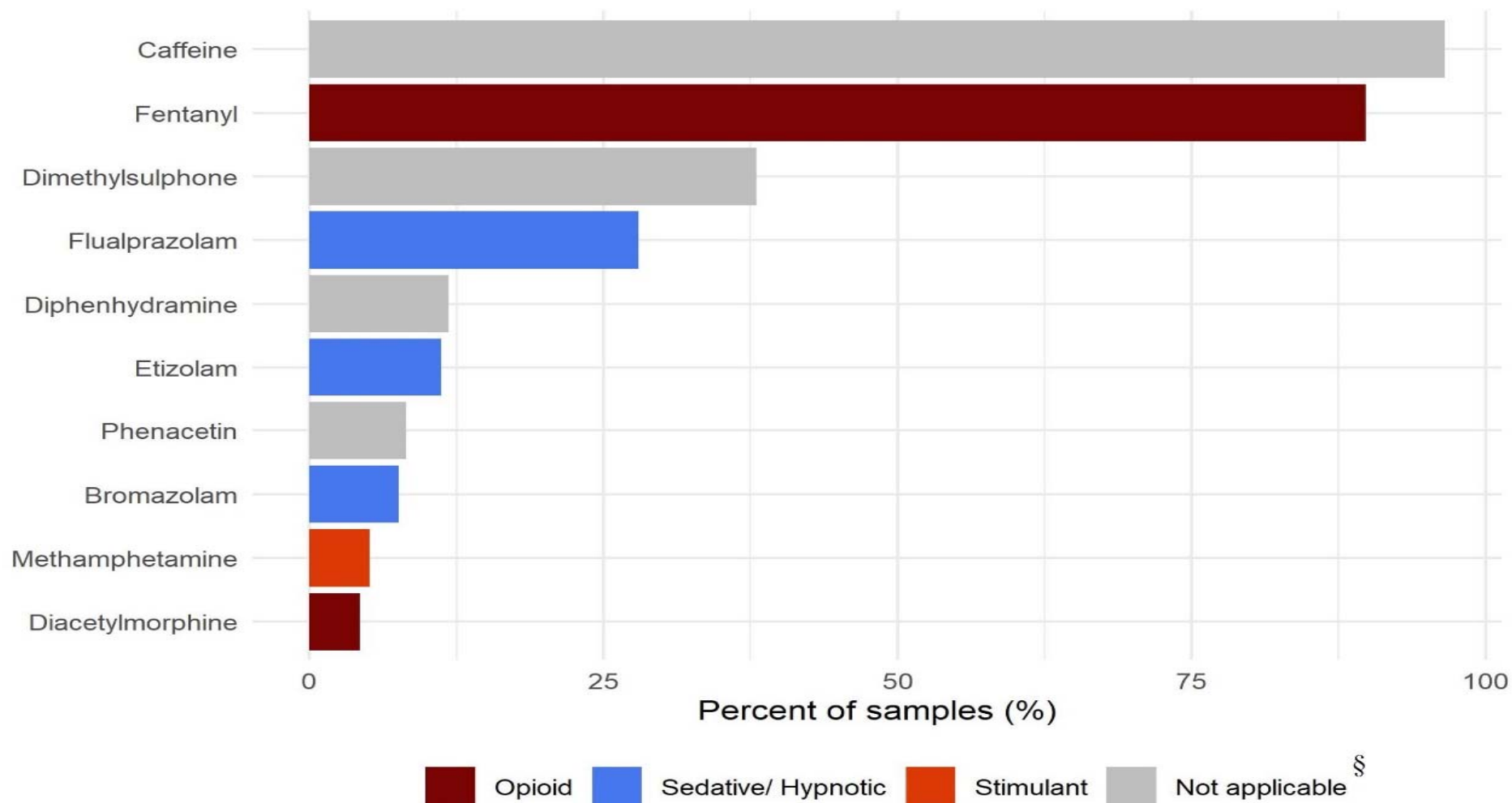


**BENZODIAZEPINES &
FENTANYL**

Benzodiazepines have been present in up to 60 percent of the fentanyl supply they can include:

Valium, Ativan, Clonazepam, Xanax, Nitrazepam, bromazepam, oxazepam, temazepam, triazolam, and flurazepam

Top 10 co-occurring substances with Xylazine (2012 to 2022)



EVERYONE DESERVES TO BE TREATED WITH
DIGNITY AND RESPECT



When our members get calls related to a homelessness issue, we need to keep these issues in mind



Our role often means trying to keep that balance of protecting the community while respecting peoples' privacy and their rights, regardless of their situation.



We work with our community partners to connect people with services of support



Questions?