

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

## Non-Fatal Overdose Incidents in Federal Custody, 2022 to 2023

*The number of non-fatal overdose incidents have increased relative to 2021 to 2022, but the overall characteristics of these incidents and the people involved in them have remained consistent.*

## Why we did this study

As part of ongoing monitoring efforts, the current study provides a summary of non-fatal overdose incidents that occurred within Canadian federal institutions in fiscal year (FY) 2022 to 2023.

## What we did

CSC's administrative database (the Offender Management System; [OMS]) was examined to identify all reported non-fatal overdose incidents in fiscal year (FY) 2022 to 2023 (April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023). Overdose incidents were included when the consumption of substances led to medical intervention (e.g., administration of Naloxone, first aid, etc.) and/or resulted in a designation of serious bodily injury. Incident reports (and Warden's Situation Reports, when available) were then coded for information pertaining to involved substances and preceding events. Profile/demographic data were extracted from the OMS.

## What we found

In 2022 to 2023, there were 143 non-fatal overdoses among 124 federally incarcerated individuals. This marks a 16.3% increase from FY 2021 to 2022, and the first time in the past three FYs that the number of incidents has increased (see Table 1). Compared to FY 2021 to 2022, the number of incidents increased in the Atlantic, Ontario, and Pacific Regions, remained relatively stable in the Prairie Region, and decreased in the Quebec Region.

Twenty-two (15.4%) overdose incidents included no information regarding suspected and/or confirmed substances<sup>1</sup>, and another 29 (20.3%) included vague substance information that made it challenging to analyze substance categories (e.g., "white powdery substance"). Therefore, the findings regarding substance categories are based upon the 92 incidents (64.3%) where substance information is available. The most common substance category<sup>2</sup> involved in the overdose incidents was opioids ( $n = 51/92$ ; 55.4%). Like previous FYs, fentanyl was the most common opioid ( $n = 25/51$ ; 49.0%), followed by suboxone ( $n = 19/51$ ; 37.3%) and/or methadone ( $n = 6/51$ ; 11.8%). The second most common substance categories involved were stimulants ( $n = 15/92$ ; 16.3%) and/or psychotropic medications<sup>3</sup> ( $n = 15/92$ ; 16.3%). 'Other' substances were identified in 45.7% of incidents ( $n = 42/92$ ). Prescription medications<sup>4</sup> were identified in 63.0% of incidents ( $n = 58/92$ ).

Many different stressors/events occurred before the overdose incidents, including but not limited to (1) general mental health issues (e.g., other recent drug overdoses/suicide attempts, symptoms of anxiety/depression;  $n = 77/143$ ; 53.8%), (2) interpersonal issues with family, romantic partners, and/or other incarcerated individuals ( $n = 64/143$ ; 44.8%), and (3) issues relating to release to the community (e.g., recent revocation or denial of release, anxiety about upcoming release, etc.;  $n = 30/143$ ; 21.0%).

Among the 124 individuals<sup>5</sup> who experienced an overdose in FY 2022 to 2023, the demographic profile was similar to previous years. Specifically, individuals tended to be Indigenous ( $n = 55/124$ ; 44.4%) or White ( $n = 52/124$ ; 41.9%) males ( $n = 116/124$ ; 93.5%) in their mid-to-late thirties ( $M = 37$  years old). Over half ( $n = 75/124$ ; 60.5%) were rated as medium-security, and the largest proportion were serving a sentence for a homicide-related offence ( $n = 41/124$ ; 33.1%) or assault ( $n = 29/124$ ; 23.4%).

**Table 1. Number of Non-Fatal Overdose Incidents in Federal Custody, FY 2019 to 2020 up to and including FY 2022 to 2023 by Region.**

Region	Fiscal Year			
	2019 to 20 <i>n</i> (%)	2020 to 21 <i>n</i> (%)	2021 to 22 <i>n</i> (%)	2022 to 23 <i>n</i> (%)
Atlantic	12 (6.90)	21 (16.03)	6 (4.92)	10 (6.99)
Quebec	23 (13.21)	23 (17.56)	24 (19.67)	14 (9.79)
Ontario	74 (42.53)	28 (21.37)	37 (30.33)	50 (34.67)
Prairie	29 (16.67)	34 (25.95)	27 (22.13)	29 (20.28)
Pacific	36 (20.69)	25 (19.08)	28 (22.95)	40 (27.97)
<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>143</b>

## What it means

Non-fatal overdose incidents have increased for the first time in three FYs; however, the in-custody population increased between FYs 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 by 5.9%<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, there were about 0.01 overdose incidents per incarcerated person in FY 2022 to 2023, which is also a marginal increase compared to FY 2021 to 2022 (0.009 incidents per incarcerated person). As such, the increase in the number of overdose incidents might be attributable to the in-custody population increase. Nevertheless, substance trends remain stable: opioids – particularly fentanyl – remain the most common substance category involved, followed by stimulants and/or psychotropic medications. Ongoing reporting of non-fatal overdose incidents remains crucial for minimizing substance-use-related harms, improving health of incarcerated individuals, and overall institutional safety.

## For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#). You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings are reported for both suspected and/or confirmed substances together and may differ from findings reported elsewhere within CSC.

<sup>2</sup> Note that several overdose incidents included multiple substances across different substance categories. As such, results regarding substance categories will not evenly add up to 92 incidents, (i.e., 100%).

<sup>3</sup> Psychotropic medications included anti-depressant, anti-anxiety, anti-psychotic, and mood stabilizer medications.

<sup>4</sup> Prescription medications included any substance that requires a prescription (e.g., Gabapentin, Methadone/Suboxone, Prozac, etc.). Because of this, the 'prescription medication' substance category is not mutually exclusive from the other substance categories. The medication did not need to be prescribed to the individual who overdosed for it to be a contributing substance in the overdose incident.

<sup>5</sup> Among the individuals with multiple overdose incidents, demographic and sentence information is taken from the most recent overdose incident.

<sup>6</sup> Information is taken from CSC's Corporate Reporting System—Modernized (CRS-M).