

FEDERAL ACTIONS ON OPIOIDS TO DATE

Recent federal actions

- [Granted a three-year exemption](#) under the [Controlled Drugs and Substances Act](#), so that adults 18 years and older in British Columbia will not be subject to criminal charges for personal possession of up to 2.5 grams total of opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine, or MDMA, or some combination thereof, between January 31, 2023 and January 31, 2026
- Issued a [new Order](#) under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to help address the illegal importation and distribution of a group of novel fentanyl precursors that are used in the illegal production of fentanyl and its analogues
- Referred [Bill C-5](#) (in June 2022) for study to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, which proposes to repeal mandatory minimum penalties for all drug offences and require police and prosecutors to consider diverting people to treatment programs giving a warning or taking no further action instead of charging and prosecuting simple drug possession offences
- Renewed [\\$17 million investment](#) in research to address substance use in Canada to ensure the continuation and expansion of the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse research and knowledge mobilization activities focused on substance use harms, such as opioids
- Released a [report](#) on area-level characteristics of substance-related acute toxicity deaths in Canada using coroner and medical examiner data from 2016-2017
- Launched a [campaign](#) aimed at men working in trades, who are disproportionately affected by the opioid overdose crisis, to promote help-seeking and link to resources and supports
- Reached out to 988 festival organizers to provide information about naloxone and encouraged the distribution of overdose prevention materials to event goers and staff

Government funding

- Committed over \$815 million since 2017 (including new federal investments announced through [Budget 2022](#)) to directly address the opioid overdose crisis and support work to save lives, which includes funding community organizations for projects through the [Substance Use and Addictions Program](#) and the [Supporting Pathways to Care for People Who Use Drugs](#) program (funding has now sunset) to support people who use drugs. For example by:
 - supporting 27 safer supply projects in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick, including a range of service delivery projects, research/knowledge transfer and exchange projects, and a National Safer Supply Community of Practice, for a total investment of \$76.5 million to provide people at risk of overdose with prescribed medications instead of the toxic illegal drug supply
 - increasing [awareness and access to naloxone](#) through projects that provide training, awareness and distribution of the life saving drug
 - helping to [reduce stigma and support families](#) affected by the overdose crisis
 - improving [harm reduction initiatives](#) to reach key groups, including Indigenous peoples, youth, post-secondary students, individuals in the correctional system, and healthcare professionals
- Invested an additional [\\$500 million](#) through the Safe Restart Agreement towards health care to respond to COVID-19, including support for people experiencing challenges with substance use, mental health, or homelessness
- Providing over \$650 million in 2022-2023 to support culturally grounded community-based mental wellness initiatives which includes funding for substance use prevention and treatment, mental wellness teams, the [Hope for Wellness Help Line](#) and more



Evidence

- Updated [modelling projections](#) through to the end of 2022, to understand and plan for potential scenarios. Under some scenarios, opioid-related deaths may remain high
- Released [results](#) of the Canadian Wastewater Survey with information on drugs and [drug metabolites](#) in wastewater samples collected from five cities
- Established an [Expert Task Force on Substance Use](#) that provided independent, expert recommendations on the federal government's drug policy and potential alternatives to criminal penalties for simple possession
- Continued collaboration with provinces and territories to support ongoing quarterly reporting of [national data](#) on opioid- and stimulant-related deaths, hospitalizations and Emergency Medical Services responses
- Published a [toolkit](#) with resources for stakeholders to respond to a need for information on medications for people at risk of overdose during the pandemic
- Funded the development of a [series of national guidance](#) documents and a [national qualitative assessment](#) identifying the needs and challenges of people who use drugs during COVID-19
- Funded a [qualitative assessment](#) of 10 safer supply projects through surveys and interviews with safer supply program leads, staff and participants to capture early learnings, including effective strategies for program delivery
- Invested over \$2 million to [evaluate program implementation and impacts of safer supply pilot projects](#), and to assess the public health impacts of supervised consumption sites located in [British Columbia](#), [the Prairies](#), [Ontario](#) and [Quebec-Atlantic](#)
- Released several [reports](#) related to furthering knowledge around opioids



Access to treatment



- Supported provinces and territories to improve access to treatment services by providing \$150 million via the [Emergency Treatment Fund](#) which, when cost-matched by provinces and territories, will total over \$300 million
- Started developing [national standards](#) for mental health and substance use services to provide an evidence-based framework for service delivery
- Supported federally-funded treatment centres for First Nations and Inuit to create and enhance their virtual treatment services since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Supported the development of guidance for health care providers, including:
 - [clinical guidelines](#) and [operational guidance](#) for injectable opioid agonist treatment
 - [national treatment guidelines for opioid use disorders](#)
- Removed barriers to accessing drugs used for the treatment of opioid use disorder by:
 - Issuing a class exemption for patients, practitioners, and pharmacists prescribing and providing controlled substances in Canada to ensure continuity of care
 - Approving [injectable hydromorphone](#) and [diacetylmorphine](#) as treatment options for patients with severe opioid use disorder
 - Facilitating the prescribing and dispensing of methadone and diacetylmorphine through [regulatory amendments](#)
 - Supporting Opioid Agonist Therapy wraparound supports in 72 First Nations and Inuit Communities and 11 new sites are in development
- [Authorized pharmacists](#) to transfer, extend and renew prescriptions for patients under their professional treatment and allowed practitioners to verbally prescribe controlled substances to help get Canadians the prescription drugs they need in their communities
- Added a new temporary category of eligible health and medical service activities and expenses through the [Reaching Home](#) program, including addictions support services that are already provided by provinces and territories and hiring health care professionals to provide services to clients
- Increasing the provision of [opioid agonist treatment](#) and implementing [SMART](#) (Self-management and Recovery Training) in Canada's correctional institutions

Awareness and prevention



- Expanded public awareness around opioids and the harms of stigma:
 - In November 2018, launched a multi-year campaign to raise awareness of opioids, how to respond to an overdose, the [Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act](#) and the [impacts of stigma](#) on people who use drugs
 - Developed and distributed [awareness resources for opioids](#), such as videos, fact sheets, posters, wallet cards, and an audio series
 - Between April 2018 and June 2022, the [Know More](#) Opioids awareness program engaged in 1,148 high school sessions, 68 post-secondary school events, 43 events/festivals and over 169,900 interactions with people
- Established the Chronic Pain Policy Team to coordinate federal efforts to respond to the [Canadian Pain Task Force](#) recommendations for priority actions, so that pain is understood, prevented, and effectively treated
- Supported the development of [Soar Above Stigma](#), a resource that provides outreach support and stigma education for Indigenous community members dealing with addiction or mental health issues
- Shared best practices for addressing [substance use stigma within the Canadian health system](#), including through use of [compassionate and non-stigmatizing language](#)
- Continued engagement activities with law enforcement to promote uptake of an online [Drug Stigma Awareness Training module](#)
- Developed a [toolkit](#) of resources for employers of Canadians working in the trades and related industries to help reduce the harms of substance use
- Developed a [Blueprint for Action](#) and [policy paper](#) for schools and community organizations that support youth, outlining practical approaches for schools to prevent substance-related harms among youth
- Adopted non-stigmatizing language in Health Services products and reviewing staff training and education aimed at reducing substance-related stigma in Canada's correctional system

Access to harm reduction



- Provided exemptions for 39 [supervised consumption sites](#), which have as of July 2022:
 - been visited more than 3.7 million times
 - reversed over 41,000 overdoses without a single death
 - made over 200,000 referrals to health and social services
- Improved access to overdose prevention services by allowing provinces and territories to establish temporary spaces where people can consume drugs under supervision to reduce risk of overdose death within existing supervised consumption sites, shelters or other temporary sites as needed
- Supported the [Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act](#), which provides some legal protection from simple drug possession charges for people who seek emergency help during an overdose
- Continued to improve access to naloxone, including to remote communities and isolated First Nations and Inuit communities and people experiencing homelessness
- Supported a [drug checking technology challenge](#) to promote development of new drug checking technologies, which included [awarding a grand prize](#) of \$1 million to Scatr Inc.
- Opened the first [Overdose Prevention Service](#) in a correctional institution to reduce overdose incidents
- Continuing to support the delivery of harm reduction activities to help reduce risks and connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness with key health and social services through the [Reaching Home](#) program

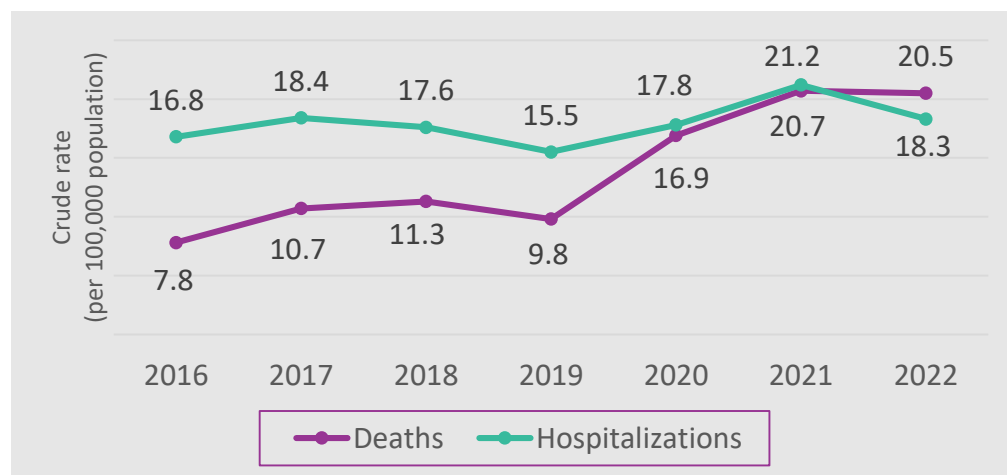
Enforcement and the toxic illegal drug supply



- Released [guidance](#) to consider alternatives to prosecution for simple drug possession offences, except when there are serious public safety concerns
- Identified opioids 100,372 times from 2018 to June 2022 in [exhibits](#) submitted to the [Drug Analysis Service](#) by law enforcement and public health officials (exhibits may contain more than one opioid)
- Working with domestic and international partners to reduce the illegal opioid supply by:
 - Providing [border services officers with tools](#) to safely identify and interdict fentanyl and other toxic substances at the border, including:
 - Implementing 81 safe examination areas at high risk ports of entry to assist in identifying and examining shipments suspected to contain opioids
 - Implementing field drug analysis sites with full-time on-site chemists in ports of entry in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver
 - Deploying 6 detector dog teams trained to detect fentanyl and other drugs
 - Working with private sector partners to address [money laundering of the proceeds of fentanyl trafficking](#)
- Continuing to investigate and [charge](#) criminal actors suspected of diverting chemical products for the purpose of manufacturing illicit substances

Opioid-related harms in Canada

From January 2016 to March 2022:



30,843
apparent opioid-related deaths

32,319 hospitalizations
for opioid-related overdoses

Recent data across Canada shows a worrying increase in opioid-related overdoses and deaths since the beginning of COVID-19:

- During the first two years of the pandemic, there was a 91% increase in apparent opioid-related deaths (15,134 deaths from April 2020 to March 2022), compared to the two years before (7,906 deaths from April 2018 to March 2020). Since then, deaths have remained high.
- During the first two years of the pandemic, there was a 24% increase in hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses (11,760 hospitalizations from April 2020 to March 2022), compared to the two years before (9,470 hospitalizations from April 2018 to March 2020). Since then, hospitalizations have continued to increase.

Between January and March 2022 :

Deaths

1,883

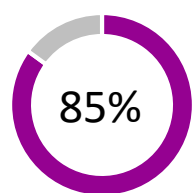
Apparent opioid-related deaths
About 21 deaths/day

96% were accidental

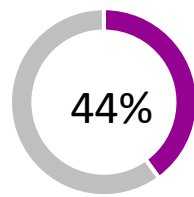


3 in 4 were male

90% were young and middle aged adults (20 to 59 years)



involved fentanyl



involved a stimulant

Hospitalizations

1,350

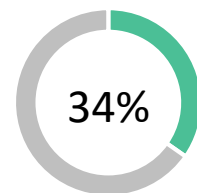
Hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses
About 15 hospitalizations/day

72% were accidental

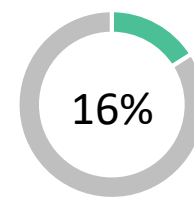


2 in 3 were male

54% were young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)



involved fentanyl



involved a stimulant

Emergency Medical Services

9,832

Emergency Medical Services responses for
suspected opioid-related overdoses



Nearly 3 in 4 were male

80% were young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)

Notes on data:

- Data on [opioid- and stimulant-related harms in Canada](#) are updated quarterly.
- Refer to [technical notes](#) for more information

Learn more at Canada.ca/Opioids