

## Recent highlights

- [Action to support people who use drugs during COVID-19](#).
- [\\$500 million investment towards health care to respond to the pandemic](#)
  - includes support for people experiencing challenges with substance use, mental health, or homelessness
- [Funding opportunity](#) to evaluate program implementation and impact of:
  - safer supply pilot interventions
  - supervised consumption sites
- CIHR and Health Canada hosted a 2-part virtual knowledge exchange event in October 2020, to discuss the outcomes of the [Evaluation of Interventions to Address the Opioid Crisis Operating Grants](#).
- Support for [education and training for law enforcement](#), through an online Drug Stigma Awareness Training module in September 2020
  - by December 2020, more than 900 law enforcement personnel had completed the training
- Committed \$66 million in funding over 2 years through the [2020 Fall Economic Statement](#) for community-based organizations responding to substance use issues, including to help them provide frontline services in a COVID-19 context.

## Access to treatment



- Improved access to treatment services through an [Emergency Treatment Fund](#) with over \$300M for provinces and territories.
- Funding pilot projects through the [Substance Use and Addictions Program](#), to provide a full spectrum of care options, including prescribed medications through safer supply models and injectable opioid agonist treatment services.
- Issued and extended a temporary exemption to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to allow prescribing with flexible treatment options to help patients adhere to public health measures during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Supported the development of [clinical guidelines](#) and [operational guidance](#) by [the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse](#) for injectable opioid agonist treatment.
- Added [diacetylmorphine](#) to the [List of Drugs for an Urgent Public Health Need](#) which allows all provinces and territories to import the medication for the treatment of opioid use disorder.
- Approved injectable hydromorphone for [treatment](#) of severe opioid use disorder in adults.
- Facilitated the prescription and dispensing of methadone and diacetylmorphine through [regulatory amendments](#).
- Supported up to 25 more community-based opioid agonist treatment sites in First Nations and Inuit communities.

## Awareness and prevention



- Expanded public awareness around opioids and the harms of stigma:
  - updated the [Know More Campaign](#) awareness tour to a virtual platform for teenagers and young adults due to the COVID-19 outbreak which has visited more than 200 sites
  - distributed more than 1 million [wallet cards](#)
  - created [videos](#) on opioids, stigma, and responding to an overdose, which were viewed more than 16 million times
- Supported the development of:
  - [opioid prescribing guidelines](#)
  - [national treatment guidelines for opioid use disorders](#)
- Shared best practices for addressing [substance use stigma within the Canadian health system](#), including through use of [compassionate and non-stigmatizing language](#)

## Evidence

- Released the [second report](#) of the [Canadian Pain Task Force](#), which summarized pan-Canadian consultations on best practices to improve understanding, prevention, and management of chronic pain in Canada.
- Continued coordinating [national data collection and publishing quarterly reports](#) on opioid-related deaths and harms
  - In December 2020, we expanded surveillance of drug-related harms beyond opioids to include data on toxicity deaths and poisoning hospitalizations where stimulants were involved.
- Updated [modelling projections](#) to show how the opioid overdose crisis may change during the COVID-19 outbreak.

## Access to harm reduction



- Approved 38 [supervised consumption sites](#) (currently operating), which have:
  - been visited more than 2.3 million times
  - reversed nearly 19,000 overdoses without a single death
  - made over 92,000 referrals to health and social services
- Supported the [Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act](#), which provides some legal protection 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 to the homeless-serving sector.
- Announced finalists of the [Drug Checking Technology Challenge](#).
- Funded [10 new projects](#) to provide people with opioid use disorder with pharmaceutical-grade medication from a licensed prescriber as an alternative to the toxic illegal supply.
- Sent [a letter from the Minister of Health to Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health and regulatory colleges](#) to encourage better care of people who use drugs, with a full spectrum of options for practitioners, including safer supply prescribing.
- [Consulted Canadians](#) on a proposal to develop new regulations for supervised consumption sites and services (August 15, 2020 to October 14, 2020).

## Tainted drug supply



- Continued working with domestic and international partners to reduce the illegal opioid supply.
- Equipped [border agents with tools](#) to intercept fentanyl and other dangerous substances at the border.
- Seized more than 8.95 kg of fentanyl at the border in between April 2018 and June 2020.
- Continued working with [private sector partners](#) to address [money laundering of the proceeds of fentanyl trafficking](#).
- Opioids were identified 21,725 times in [exhibits](#) submitted by law enforcement and public health officials in 2019. From January 1 to September 30, 2020, opioids were identified 13,330 times in exhibits submitted by law enforcement and public health officials
  - An exhibit may contain more than one opioid

# OPIOID RELATED HARMS in Canada

From January 2016 to June 2020 there have been:

17,602

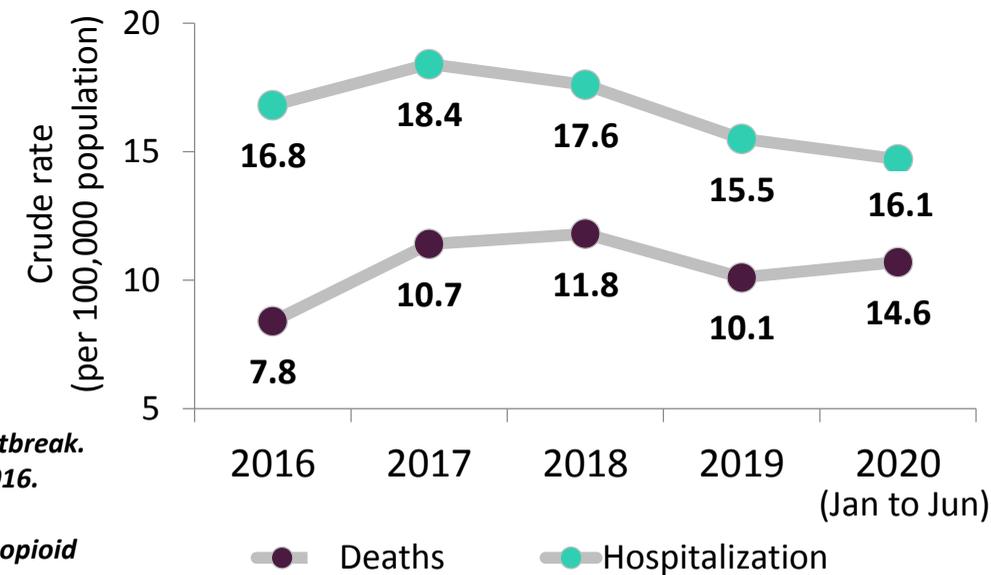
Apparent opioid-related deaths, or nearly 11 per day

21,824

Opioid-related poisoning hospitalizations, or 13 per day

Recent data from several jurisdictions across Canada show a worrying increase in opioid-related harms and deaths since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. 1,628 apparent opioid toxicity deaths from April to June 2020 is the highest ever recorded in single quarter since national level surveillance began in 2016.

Modelling projections to June 2021 suggest that the number of opioid-related overdose deaths could substantially surpass those seen at the height of the opioid overdose crisis in late 2018.



## In 2020 (Jan to Jun):

### Deaths

2,670

Apparent opioid toxicity deaths occurred between January and June 2020

There was a 58% increase in deaths between April and June 2020 compared to January to March, and a 54% increase compared to April to June 2019.

97% Were accidental



Among accidental opioid related deaths: **3 in 4 were male**

68% Were among young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)

30% Were among older adults (50 years or more)



Involved fentanyl



Involved non-pharmaceutical opioids



Involved a stimulant

### Hospitalizations

2,368

Opioid-related poisoning hospitalizations occurred between January and June 2020

A 22% increase was observed between April and June 2020 compared to January to March as well as a 7% increase compared to the same period in 2019.

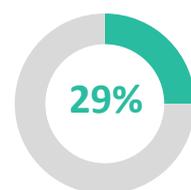
66% Were accidental



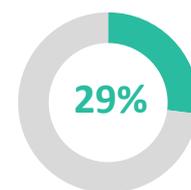
Among accidental hospitalizations: **2 in 3 were male**

52% Were among young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)

44% Were among older adults (50 years or more)



Involved fentanyl or fentanyl analogues



Involved one or more types of non-opioid substances

### Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

> 12,100

EMS responses for a suspected opioid overdoses occurred between January and June 2020

A 68% increase between April and June 2020 compared to January and March as well as a 27% increase compared to the same period in 2019.



Based on available data from **9** provinces and territories: **3 in 4 were male**

77% Were among young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)

19% Were among older adults (50 years or more)

#### Notes on data

- Data on apparent opioid toxicity deaths are collected from the provincial and territorial offices of Chief Coroners and Chief Medical Examiners. Due to jurisdictional differences in identifying and reporting cases, data should be interpreted with caution. Data from Quebec (2019 and 2020), and British Columbia data (2018 to 2020) included in national counts only, include deaths related to all illicit drugs including opioids.
- Data on opioid-related poisoning hospitalizations were available from the Discharge Abstract Database (DAD), a national administrative database from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI). Data from Quebec were not available at time of analysis.
- There is currently no national case definition for suspected opioid-related overdoses attended by Emergency Medical Services. Each region reports EMS data based on their respective provincial/territorial case definition.
- New or revised data reported will be reflected in future updates.



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