Recent highlights

- The Minister of Health has sent a letter to Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health and regulatory colleges to encourage action at all levels to support people who use drugs, including increasing access to safer, pharmaceutical-grade alternatives to the contaminated illegal drug supply for people at risk of overdose
- The funding of 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
- An investment of $500 million towards health care to respond to the pandemic, which will include support for Canadians experiencing challenges with substance use, mental health, or homelessness
- Health Canada is consulting Canadians (from August 15, 2020 to October 14, 2020) to inform proposed new regulations for supervised consumption sites and services

Access to treatment

- Funding pilot projects on injectable opioid agonist treatment
- Improving access to treatment services through an Emergency Treatment Fund that has mobilized over $300M for provinces and territories
- Facilitated opioid agonist treatment by allowing the import of medications approved elsewhere, methadone prescribing and the use of diacetylmorphine and hydromorphone
- Supporting up to an additional 25 community-based opioid agonist treatment sites in First Nations and Inuit communities
- Funding pilot projects on safer supply and injectable opioid agonist treatment through the Substance Use and Addictions Program

Access to harm reduction

- Approved 40 supervised consumption sites which have been visited more than 2.2 million times, reversed over 17,600 overdoses without a single death at a site, and made over 85,800 referrals to health and social services
- Supported the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act, which provides some legal protection for individuals who seek emergency help during an overdose
- Continued facilitation of access to naloxone, including remote communities and isolated First Nations and Inuit communities
- Announced finalists of the Drug Checking Technology Challenge

Awareness and prevention

- Expanding public awareness around opioids and the harms of stigma:
  - [Know More Campaign](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/know-more-campaign.html) awareness tour for teenagers and young adults that has visited nearly 200 sites
  - Distributed more than 1 million wallet cards
  - Videos on opioids, stigma, and responding to an overdose viewed more than 16 million times
- Supported the development of opioid prescribing guidelines and national treatment guidelines for opioid use disorders
- Sharing best practices for addressing substance use stigma within the Canadian health system, including through use of compassionate and non-stigmatizing language

Tainted drug supply

- Working with domestic and international partners to reduce the illegal opioid supply
- Supporting education and training for law enforcement
- Equipped border agents with tools to intercept fentanyl and other dangerous substances at the border
- Seized more than 2kg of fentanyl at the border in 2019-2020
- Opioids were identified 21,725 times in exhibits* submitted by law enforcement and public health officials in 2019. From January 1st – March 31st 2020, opioids were identified 4304 times in exhibits submitted by law enforcement and public health officials

Evidence

- Continuing to engage with the [Canadian Pain Task Force](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/pain-task-force.html), building from their first report on the state of chronic pain, by conducting national consultations on best and leading practices, which could improve understanding, prevention, and management of chronic pain in Canada
- Coordinating national data collection and publishing quarterly reports on apparent opioid related deaths and harms

*Note: an exhibit may contain more than one opioid
From January 2016 to March 2020 there have been:

- Apparent opioid-related deaths, or nearly 11 per day: 16,364
- Opioid-related poisoning hospitalizations, or 13 per day: 20,523

While this national update includes data until March 2020, reports from several jurisdictions across Canada indicate an alarming increase in opioid-related harms in recent months likely due to the impact of COVID-19 public measures.

In 2020 (Jan to Mar):

**Deaths**

- Apparent opioid-related deaths occurred between January and March 2020: 1,018
  - 96% Were accidental
  - Among accidental hospitalizations: 3 in 4 were male
  - 69% Were among young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)
  - 29% Were among older adults (50 years or more)

**Hospitalizations**

- Opioid-related poisoning hospitalizations occurred between January and March 2020: 1,067
  - 64% Were accidental
  - Among accidental hospitalizations: 3 in 5 were male
  - 46% Were among young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)
  - 51% Were among older adults (50 years or more)

**Emergency Medical Services (EMS)**

- EMS responses for a suspected opioid overdoses occurred between January and March 2020: >4,560
  - Based on available data from 9 provinces and territories:
    - 3 in 4 were male
    - 71% Were among young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)
    - 23% Were among older adults (50 years or more)

Apparent opioid-related death data from BC and QC (2019 and 2020) includes deaths related to all illicit drugs including, but not limited to, 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.

*Among deaths with completed investigations from four provinces*