

# FEDERAL ACTIONS ON OPIOIDS TO DATE

## Recent highlights

- Updated [modelling projections](#) during COVID-19 show that opioid-related deaths may remain high through the remainder of 2021 and into 2022
- Released a [report](#) on hospitalizations for neonatal abstinence syndrome, including trends from 2010 to 2020
- Introduced [Bill C-5](#) (former [Bill C-22](#)) on December 7, 2021 which proposes to repeal mandatory minimum penalties for all drug offences and require police and prosecutors to consider using diversion, including to treatment programs instead of charges, for simple possession of an illegal drug
- Established an [Expert Task Force on Substance Use](#) in March 2021 to provide independent, expert recommendations on the federal government's drug policy, as outlined in the [Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy \(CDSS\)](#), including alternatives to criminal penalties for personal possession of small amounts of illegal drugs
- Supported the development of the [Soar Above Stigma Campaign](#), which aims to propel the Indigenous values of hope, belonging, meaning and purpose through the sharing of Indigenous voices and perspectives to ease the tension of stigma due to fears surrounding COVID-19 as well as escalating mental health issues and substance use
- Continue to [support people who use drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

## Project Funding



- [Budget 2021](#) committed new funding for many substance-related initiatives, including, but not limited to the [Substance Use and Addictions Program](#) (SUAP), the [Wellness Together Canada Portal](#), the development of national standards for mental health and substance use, access to Drug Treatment Courts, distinctions-based mental health and wellness strategies with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis, and to address homelessness and housing for at risk populations
- Committed \$66 million in funding over 2 years through the [2020 Fall Economic Statement](#) for 32 new [SUAP](#) funded projects for community-based organizations responding to substance use issues
- Invested [\\$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
- Continue to fund additional projects through the [SUAP](#) and the [Supporting Pathways to Care for People Who Use Drugs](#) program to support people who use drugs. For example by:
  - supporting 18 safer supply projects across 29 sites for a total investment of \$60.2 million to provide people at risk of overdose with prescribed medications
  - increasing [awareness and access to naloxone](#) through projects that provide training, awareness and distribution
  - 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 over \$2 million to evaluate program implementation and impacts of safer supply pilot projects, and to assess the public health impact of supervised consumption sites

## Evidence



- The Canadian Pain Task Force released its third report in May 2021 - [An Action Plan for Pain in Canada](#), which includes recommendations to ensure people with pain are recognized and supported, and that pain is understood, prevented, and effectively treated throughout Canada
- Continued collaboration with provinces and territories to support ongoing quarterly reporting of [national data](#) on opioid- and stimulant-related deaths and harms, such as 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
- Developed a [series of national guidance](#) documents related to substance use in the context of COVID-19

## Access to treatment



- Improved access to treatment services through an [Emergency Treatment Fund](#) with over \$300 million for provinces and territories
- 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:
  - Approving [injectable hydromorphone](#)
  - Adding [diacetylmorphine](#) to the *List of Drugs for an Urgent Public Health Need* to allow importation by provinces and territories
  - Facilitating the prescription and dispensing of methadone and diacetylmorphine through [regulatory amendments](#)
  - Supporting Opioid Agonist Therapy wraparound supports in 72 First Nations and Inuit Communities

## 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, an audio series and more
  - Between April 2018 and November 2021, the [Know More](#) Tour engaged in 794 high school sessions, 68 post-secondary school events, 43 events/festivals and nearly 155,000 interactions with people on the facts surrounding the overdose crisis, opioids, fentanyl, naloxone and stigma
    - Due to COVID-19, updated to a virtual platform since October 2020, increasing reach to more students and rural and remote schools
- Shared best practices for addressing [substance use stigma within the Canadian health system](#), including through use of [compassionate and non-stigmatizing language](#)
- Launched an online [Drug Stigma Awareness Training module](#) to educate and train law enforcement

## Access to harm reduction



- Provided exemptions for 38 [supervised consumption sites](#) (currently operating), which have (as of June 2021):
  - been visited more than 2.9 million times
  - reversed nearly 27,000 overdoses without a single death
  - made over 127,000 referrals to health and social services
- [Consulted Canadians](#) on a proposal to develop new regulations for supervised consumption sites and services
- Supported the [Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act](#), which provides some legal protection from 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 to the homeless-serving sector
- Announced the winner and finalists of the [Drug Checking Technology Challenge](#)

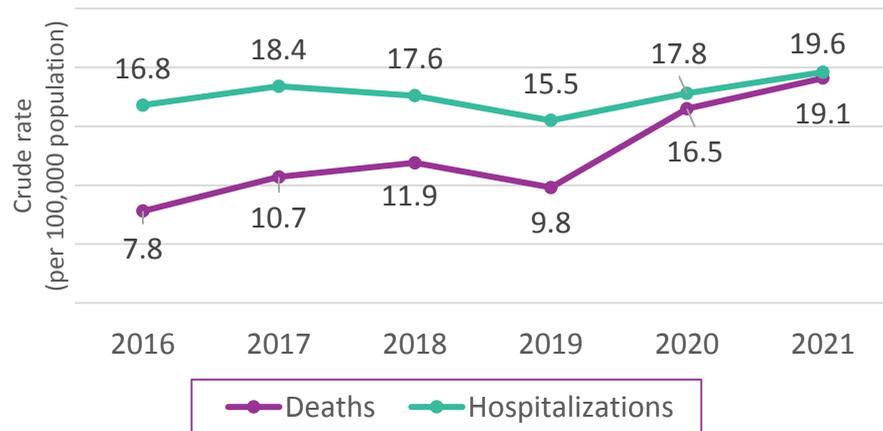
## Enforcement and tainted drug supply



- Released a [guideline](#) that directs prosecutors to focus on the most serious cases raising public safety concerns for prosecution regarding the possession of a controlled substance and to otherwise pursue suitable alternative measures and diversion from the criminal justice system for simple possession cases
- Identified opioids 80,094 times from 2018 to September 2021 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; including but not limited to:
  - Equipping [border agents with tools](#) to intercept fentanyl and other toxic substances at the border
    - Seized more than 18.1 kg of fentanyl at the border between April 2018 and October 2021
    - Implementing 81 designated safe examination areas by early 2023 at high risk ports of entry which allow officers to safely conduct examinations of items suspected to contain opioids and fentanyl
    - Deployment of 6 new detector dog teams at mail processing centres trained to detect fentanyl in addition to other drugs
    - Constructed regional designated safe sampling areas in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver
  - Working with [private sector partners](#) to address [money laundering of the proceeds of fentanyl trafficking](#)
- Continue 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 June 2021:



**24,626**  
apparent opioid-related deaths

**27,604 hospitalizations**  
for opioid-related overdoses

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:

- The latest surveillance data show that 2020 (6,306 deaths) had the highest number of deaths in a year since surveillance began in 2016, and the numbers remain high through the first half of 2021 (3,515 deaths)
- From April to June 2021, the highest quarterly numbers since surveillance began were reported for both hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses (1,464) and for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) responses to suspected opioid-related overdoses (9,782)

Between January and June 2021 :

## Deaths

**3,515**

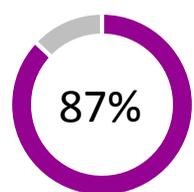
**Apparent opioid-related deaths, nearly 19/day**  
1,720 deaths between Apr-Jun 2021, similar to the Jan-Mar 2021 period, but a 2% increase compared to Apr-Jun 2020 and a 66% increase compared to Apr-Jun 2019

**96 %** were accidental

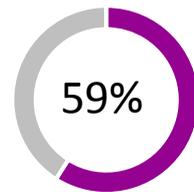


3 in 4 were male

71% were young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)



involved fentanyl



involved a stimulant

## Hospitalizations

**2,908**

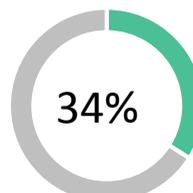
**Hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses, nearly 16/day**  
1,464 hospitalizations between Apr-Jun 2021, similar to the Jan-Mar 2021 period, but an 11% increase compared to Apr-Jun 2020 and a 20% increase compared to Apr-Jun 2019

**69 %** were accidental

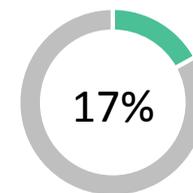


2 in 3 were male

57% were young and middle aged adults (20 to 49 years)



involved fentanyl



involved a stimulant

## Emergency Medical Services

**17,400**

**EMS responses for suspected opioid-related overdoses**  
9,782 EMS responses between Apr-Jun 2021, 27% higher than from Jan-Mar 2021. Also a 31% increase from Apr-Jun 2020 and a 63% increase compared to Apr-Jun 2019



Nearly 3 in 4 were male

78% 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](https://Canada.ca/Opioids)