

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

FEDERAL ACTIONS ON OPIOIDS TO DATE

Recent highlights

- Developing [national standards](#) for mental health and substance use services to provide an evidence-based framework for service delivery
- Approved [diacetylmorphine](#) as a new treatment option for patients with severe Opioid Use Disorder
- Released a [report](#) on the co-occurrence of opioid pain relief medication use and mood disorders among Canadian adults in 2018
- Released [results](#) of the Canadian Wastewater Survey with information on drugs and drug metabolites in wastewater samples collected from five cities
- 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
- 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: [Wellness Together Canada Portal](#); 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, including people who use substances; and enhancing and expanding wraparound services at Opioid Agonist Therapy sites in First Nations and Inuit communities
- Invested over \$182 million through the [2020 Fall Economic Statement](#) and Budget 2021 in support of community-based organizations responding to substance use issues, including investments to help them provide frontline services in a COVID-19 context and to scale-up key lifesaving measures and increase access to a safer drug supply as an alternative to the contaminated supply
- 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 [Substance Use and Addictions Program](#) and the [Supporting Pathways to Care for People Who Use Drugs](#) program to support people who use drugs. For example by:
 - supporting 17 safer supply projects in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick, and one national community of practice, for a total investment of \$60.2 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

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 pursue alternative measures and diversion from the criminal justice system for simple possession cases
- Identified opioids 86,578 times from 2018 to December 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 18.25 kg of fentanyl at the border between April 2018 and January 2022
 - 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

Access to treatment



- Supported provinces and territories to improve access to treatment services by providing \$150 million via the [Emergency Treatment Fund](#), which were cost-matched to total over \$300 million
- Supported federally-funded treatment centres 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:
 - 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 prescribing and dispensing of methadone and diacetylmorphine through [regulatory amendments](#)
 - Supporting Opioid Agonist Therapy wraparound supports in 72 First Nations and Inuit Communities
- Increasing the provision of [opioid agonist treatment](#) and implementing [SMART](#) (Self-management and Recovery Training) in Canada's correctional institutions

Access to harm reduction



- Provided exemptions for 38 [supervised consumption sites](#) (currently operating), which have (since 2017, and as of November 2021):
 - been visited more than 3.3 million times
 - reversed nearly 35,000 overdoses without a single death
 - made over 148,000 referrals to health and social 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 people experiencing homelessness
- [Awarded](#) the grand prize of \$1 million to Scatr as the winner of the [Drug Checking Technology Challenge](#)
- Opened the first [Overdose Prevention Service](#) in a correctional institution to reduce overdose incidents

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 January 2022, the [Know More](#) Tour engaged in 907 high school sessions, 68 post-secondary school events, 43 events/festivals and nearly 156,000 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)
- 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
- 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
- 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

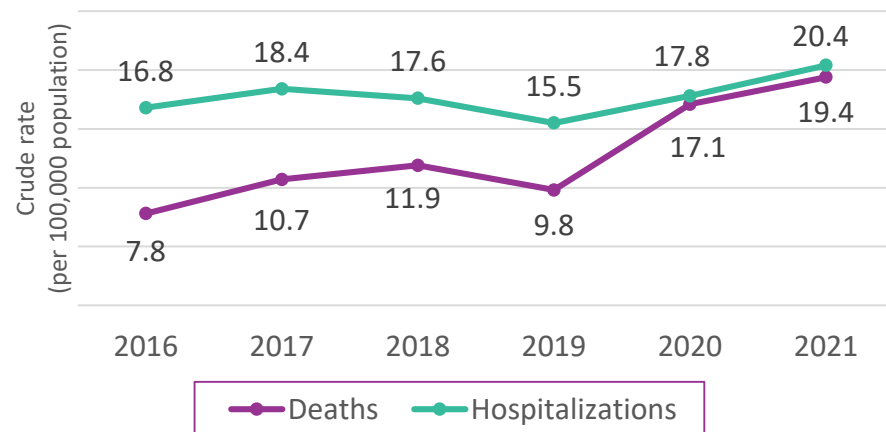
Evidence



- Updated [modelling projections](#) during COVID-19 show that opioid-related deaths may remain high through the remainder of 2021 and into 2022
- The Canadian Pain Task Force, which concluded December 31, 2021, released its third and final report - [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
- 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. [Reports](#) from the Task Force were published in May and June 2021
- 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, as well as a [national qualitative assessment](#) identifying the needs and challenges of people who use drugs during COVID-19
- 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](#), in the context of COVID-19
- Released several [reports](#) related to furthering knowledge around opioids

Opioid-related harms in Canada

From January 2016 to September 2021:



26,690
apparent opioid-related deaths

29,228 hospitalizations
for opioid-related overdoses

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

- During the first year of the pandemic, there was a 95% increase in apparent opioid-related deaths (April 2020 – March 2021, 7,224 deaths), compared to the year before (April 2019 – March 2020, 3,711 deaths). Since then, deaths have remained high.
- During the first year of the pandemic, there was a 27% increase in hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses (April 2020 – March 2021, 5,599 hospitalizations), compared to the year before (April 2019 – March 2020, 4,426 hospitalizations). Since then, hospitalizations have continued to increase.

Between January and September 2021 :

Deaths

5,368

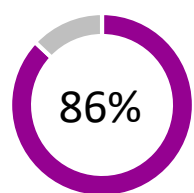
Apparent opioid-related deaths
About 20 deaths/day

97% were accidental

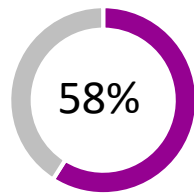


3 in 4 were male

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



involved fentanyl



involved a stimulant

Hospitalizations

4,532

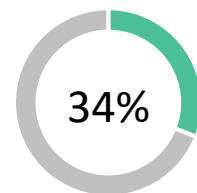
Hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses
About 17 hospitalizations/day

70% were accidental

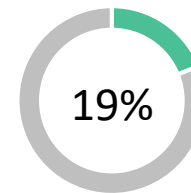


2 in 3 were male

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



involved fentanyl



involved a stimulant

Emergency Medical Services

34,642

EMS responses for suspected opioid-related overdoses



Nearly 3 in 4 were male

79% 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