
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Illicit drug overdose Death Review Panel releases recommendations

VICTORIA – A Death Review Panel report released today reviewed all illicit drug overdose deaths in British Columbia over a 19-month period, and makes recommendations to a number of ministries in government and related colleges in the province.

The BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: A Review of Illicit Drug Overdoses examined all illicit drug overdose deaths in B.C. between Jan. 1, 2016, and July 31, 2017. The panel identified three areas of focus toward reducing illicit drug overdose deaths in B.C.:

1. The need to provincially regulate and appropriately oversee treatment and recovery programs and facilities to ensure that they provide evidence-based quality care, and that outcomes are closely monitored and evaluated;
2. The need to expand access to evidence-based addiction care across the continuum, including improved opioid agonist therapies (OAT) and injectable opioid agonist therapies (iOAT) access, as well as a full spectrum of recovery supports; and,
3. The need to improve safer drug-use, through the creation of accessible provincial drug checking services using validated technologies.

The Death Review Panel, chaired by Michael Egilson, included 21 panel experts from health care, policing, corrections, First Nations, education, and mental health and addictions.

“The clearest finding that has come through this review is the reaffirmation that the biggest problem we face in terms of overdose deaths is the recent increase in drug toxicity,” said Egilson. “In particular, the potency and content of illicit substances is unpredictable; this is why we’re advocating for access to safer drug use, including opioid agonist therapy, tools like drug checking and Take Home Naloxone kits, as well as an evidence-based treatment and recovery system of care.”

The Death Review Panel report makes recommendations aimed at helping to curb the trend of illicit drug overdose deaths in the province. The full report is available at:

<http://ow.ly/HR1S30jk21U>

The release of the Death Review Panel report comes in conjunction with BC Coroners Service’s updated illicit drug overdose death statistics to the end of February 2018. There were 102 suspected illicit drug overdose deaths in February 2018, a 16% decrease over the number of deaths in February 2017, and a 19% decrease over the number of deaths occurring in January 2018 (126). The average number of illicit drug overdose deaths in February 2018 is 3.6 deaths per day.

Quick Facts:

- A group of deaths with similar factors may be investigated in aggregate through a BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel. They are undertaken to fully examine the circumstances in deaths in order to develop recommendations to reduce the likelihood of similar deaths.
- Death Review Panels review the facts and circumstances of deaths to provide advice to the chief coroner respecting medical, legal, social, welfare and other matters that may impact public health and safety.
- General statistical information of 1,854 illicit drug overdoses in B.C. during the 19-month period of this review is included in this Death Review Panel review. A detailed case review sample of one-third of these deaths (615) was also included. Some notable findings with the case-review sample:
 - Persons who use illicit substances on a regular basis were more likely to die of an overdose;
 - Persons using illicit substances alone were also more likely to die of an overdose;
 - Fentanyl is being detected in an increasing percentage of illicit drug overdose deaths (in four of every five deaths in July 2017, the end of the Death Review Panel review period);
 - Approximately nine in every 10 deaths occurred indoors;
 - Males accounted for four in every five deaths;
 - About one in every 10 decedents were homeless; and,
 - Indigenous people were overrepresented (10%) in the total number of illicit drug overdose deaths relative to their total population (3.4%) in B.C.
- About two-thirds of people dying from all illicit drug overdoses between January 2016 and July 2017 had B.C. Corrections involvement at some time in their lives, or were currently under B.C. Corrections supervision.

Learn More:

Updated illicit drug overdose statistics to end of February, 2018: <http://ow.ly/Cwon30jk10z>

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