

B.C.'s Opioid Overdose Response One-Year Update

Joint Task Force on Overdose Prevention and Response

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B.C.'s Opioid Overdose Response: One-Year Update

One year after the declaration of B.C.'s public health emergency, the Joint Task Force on Overdose Prevention and Response and its partners continue to deliver on a comprehensive response plan. Areas of focus and select achievements from the past 12 months are highlighted in this document. For additional details on how B.C. is addressing the public health emergency, including next steps in the response, please visit www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics. To find resources for the public, please visit www.gov.bc.ca/overdose.

The Joint Task Force's response remains focused on seven key areas:

1. **Immediate response to an overdose** by expanding naloxone availability and the reach of supervised consumption services in the province.
2. **Preventing overdoses before they happen** by improving treatment options for people with opioid use disorder, exploring drug checking services and improving health professional education and guidance.
3. **Public education and awareness about overdose prevention and response** through public awareness campaigns.
4. **Monitoring, surveillance and applied research** by improving timely data collection, reporting and analysis to inform action, evaluating implementation, and applied research.
5. **Improving the scheduling of substances and equipment under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* and the *Precursor Control Regulations*** by regulating drug manufacturing equipment such as pill presses, regulating precursors.
6. **Improving federal enforcement and interdiction strategies** by working with the Canada Border Services Agency to increase enforcement activities to interdict the importation of illicit drugs.
7. **Enhancing the capacity of police to support harm reduction efforts related to street drugs** by providing training to police and other first responders to support safe fentanyl identification and handling practices.

1. Immediate response to an overdose

Highlights of actions to date:

- B.C.'s [Take Home Naloxone](#) program has distributed over 28,000 kits over the last 12 months to people at risk of overdose, and to those likely to witness and respond to overdoses.
- Multiple amendments have been made to provincial and federal regulations to allow anyone, anywhere in B.C. to purchase naloxone without a prescription and administer it.
- RCMP and municipal police departments have acquired naloxone and are completing training. As of April 4, 2017, RCMP and municipal police have administered more than 100 doses of naloxone.
- More than 20 overdose prevention service locations continue to operate across the province. Since the sites were established in December 2016, they have had over 66,000 visits and have reversed more than 480 overdoses, with zero deaths.
- B.C.'s Mobile Medical Unit has alleviated pressures on emergency departments, provided access to opioid use disorder and other substance use-related treatment, and has saved hundreds of lives. More than 2,500 patients have been treated, including 566 overdose patients.
- The Office of the Provincial Health Officer has posted [guidelines](#) for supportive housing and homeless shelters to prevent, recognize and respond to overdoses in their facilities.
- The majority of the regional health authorities have submitted applications to Health Canada to open new supervised consumption sites.
- Beginning May 1, 2017, Health Emergency Management BC's Disaster Psychosocial Program will deploy a new Mobile Response Team of 12 practitioners to areas in B.C. experiencing a high number of overdoses. The team will support frontline workers, emergency responders, volunteers and staff from community-based organizations impacted by the overdose crisis.

2. Preventing overdoses before they happen

Highlights of actions to date:

- The BC Centre on Substance Use has been established with a mandate to provide expertise in health provider education, clinical care guidance and research. Since Oct. 1, 2016, the centre has hosted 27 training sessions throughout B.C., with more than 1,200 health-care providers educated on how to best treat patients with opioid use disorder.
- The BC Centre on Substance Use released updated [guidelines](#) on treating opioid use disorder.
- A patient [handbook](#) to navigate the opioid agonist treatment system has been developed by patients with medication-assisted treatment for opioid dependence.
- Nurse practitioners can now continue existing prescriptions for Suboxone™ for patients whose doctor initiated them on this treatment method.

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- The College of Physicians and Surgeons of B.C. have made it easier for physicians to prescribe buprenorphine/naloxone and have adopted new professional standards on safe prescribing of opioid medications.
- The number of people started on buprenorphine/naloxone increased on average from 127 people per month in 2015 to 284 in 2016.
- Opioid agonist treatments (methadone and buprenorphine/naloxone) are 100% covered under PharmaCare for individuals who experience financial barriers to accessing this treatment.
- Connections Clinic, offering on-demand opioid agonist treatment, and an onsite care team opened in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.
- B.C. opened 500 new substance use treatment spaces between 2013 and 2017, and will open an [additional](#) 65 intensive residential beds and 50 intensive outpatient treatment spaces over the next few months.
- [Withdrawal Management Guidelines](#) for youth and adults have been released.
- InSite has undertaken a pilot project to test for the presence of fentanyl in street drug samples.

3. Public education and awareness about overdose prevention and response

Highlights of actions to date:

- B.C. launched a multi-pronged public awareness [campaign](#) across multiple mediums, including radio, television, social media, posters in restaurants and bars, and bus shelter ads.
- The province's [microsite](#) is regularly updated so the public is well-informed and has access to resources such as [school curriculum materials](#) and [HealthLinkBC files](#).
- The Justice Institute of B.C. launched www.fentanylsafety.com to provide first responders with accurate safety information related to situations where opioids may be involved.

4. Monitoring, surveillance, and applied research

Highlights of actions to date:

- The Office of the Provincial Health Officer receives regular reporting on a wide range of data to inform action. The [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) publishes public summary reports every two months.
- Analysis of individuals who have suffered from non-fatal and fatal overdose is underway.
- The Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research is conducting a rapid review of how other jurisdictions respond to opioid overdoses. Their findings will inform an evaluation of B.C.'s response and potential next steps.
- The Provincial Health Services Authority has purchased a mass spectrometer to test blood samples for opioids and other new substances, including carfentanil.

5. Improving the scheduling of substances and equipment under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* and the Precursor Control Regulations

Highlights of actions to date:

- Health Canada has regulated six precursors used in the manufacture of synthetic opioids.
- The RCMP and Chinese Ministry of Public Security announced joint efforts to curb the importation of illegal synthetic opioids into Canada.
- The province has engaged with the federal government to underscore the need to regulate illegal drug manufacturing equipment and control chemical components of synthetic opioids.

6. Improving federal enforcement and interdiction strategies

Highlights of actions to date:

- The Task Force continues to work with law enforcement and the Canada Border Services Agency to intercept, detect, and investigate illegally imported fentanyl and precursors.
- BC is taking actions to reduce overdoses from many different angles, including law enforcement. Additional advanced equipment and training, which will enhance police ability to immediately test and detect fentanyl is being acquired. The B.C. Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit is leading the province-wide Provincial Tactical Enforcement Priority. As a result of the overdose crisis, police have prioritized investigative resources to target traffickers of these deadly illicit drugs.
- Funding was allocated last year to purchase drug detection equipment for both the BC RCMP and for municipal police departments.

The Joint Task Force on Overdose Response has partners from both the Ministries of Health and Public Safety and supports a strengthened partnership with the federal government to make progress on measures that fall under federal jurisdiction.

7. Enhancing the capacity of police to support harm reduction efforts related to street drugs

Highlights of actions to date:

- B.C. has purchased 7,800 naloxone kits, and provided training to the RCMP and municipal police. Nearly 7,000 police members and civilian staff have been trained and nearly 100 opioid overdoses have been reversed.
- Funding has been provided for outreach and awareness strategies, including community dialogues through the Centre for Addictions Research of B.C., enhancing the “Know your Source” campaign, and developing workshops for first responders through the Justice Institute of British Columbia.
- The province continues to work with the RCMP and municipal police departments to support the formulation of operational policies to decrease opioid overdose deaths.

Federal Engagement

Highlights of actions to date:

- Officials from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General continue to engage with the federal government to remove legislative barriers to addressing B.C.'s opioid overdose emergency. The federal Bill C-37 proposes amendments to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* and related amendments to other federal legislation. Proposed amendments include, among other things, a streamlined application process for expanding supervised consumption services, regulation of drug manufacturing equipment and newly identified chemical precursors, and additional legislative tools to support health and law enforcement officials to reduce harms associated with problematic substance use in Canada.