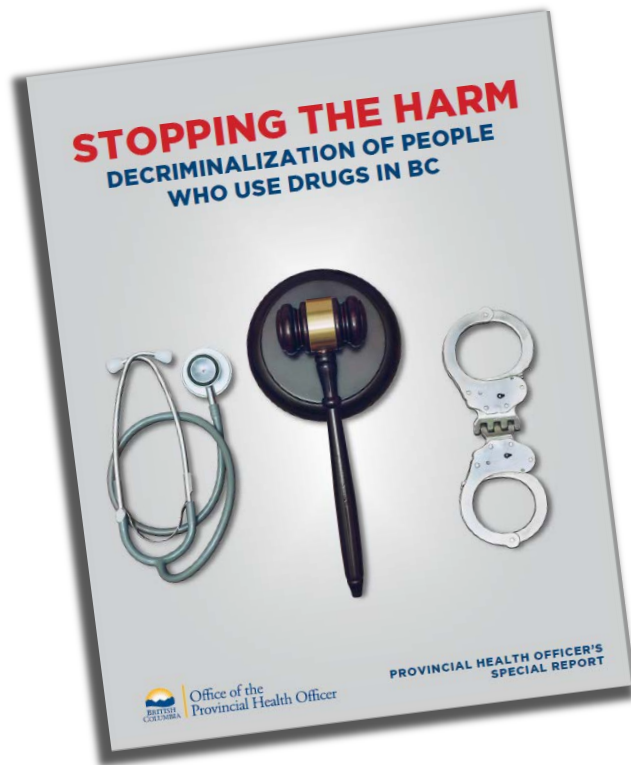




Office of the  
Provincial Health Officer

# Stopping the Harm: Decriminalization of People Who Use Drugs in BC

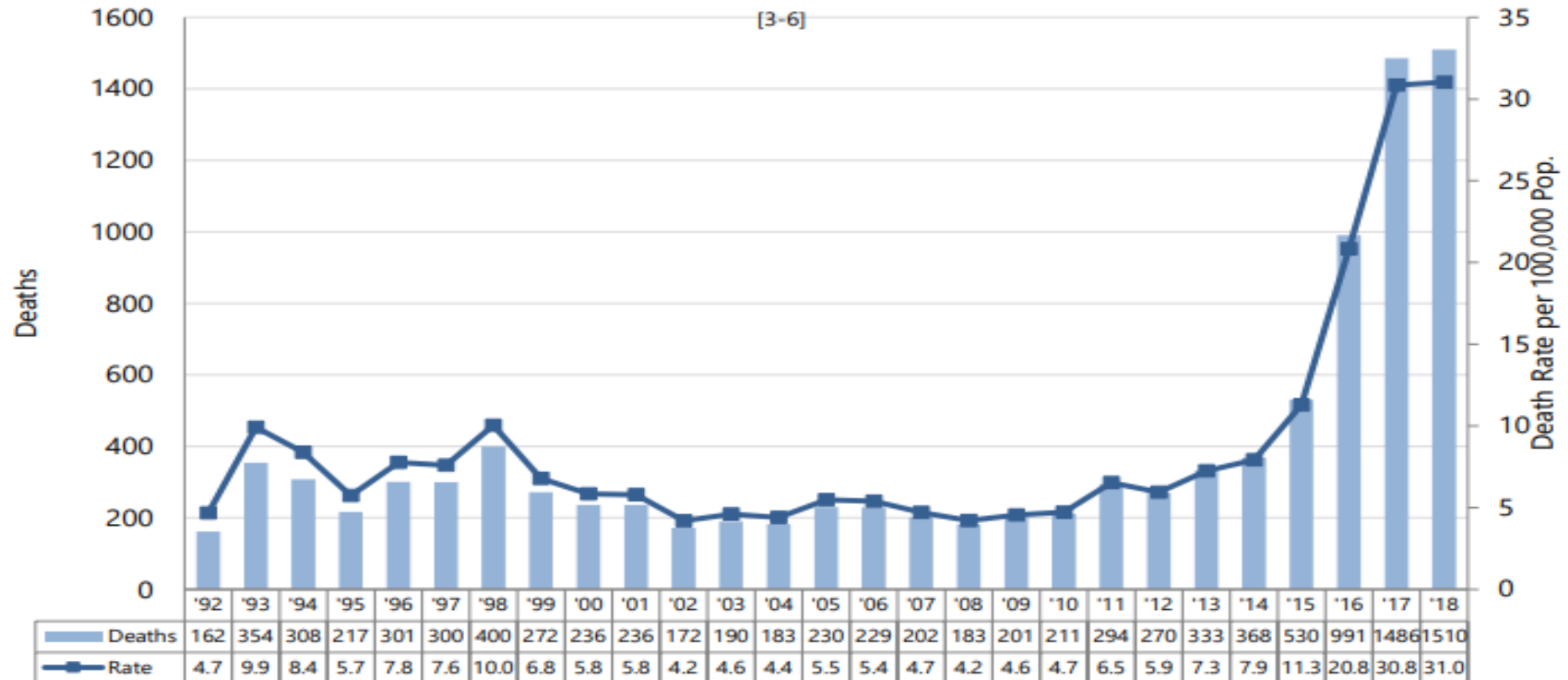


## PHO Special Report

Dr. Bonnie Henry  
Provincial Health Officer

April 24, 2019

# Overdose Deaths in BC



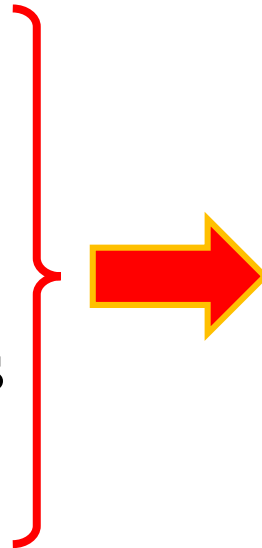
# Successes since April 2016

- 10 Naloxone kits distributed



**1 death of a British  
Columbian averted**

- Naloxone distribution
- Combined with supervised consumption services
- Overdose prevention services
- Opioid agonist treatment



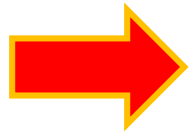
**60% of all possible  
overdose deaths  
averted**

**4,700 deaths  
prevented**

---

# The Crisis Continues

- Despite these successful initiatives, the number of British Columbians dying from and vulnerable to overdose remains unacceptably high.



**Average of 4 British Columbians dying each day.**

- Overdose deaths have become so pervasive that they are having a measured, negative impact on life expectancy at birth in BC—impacting everyone.

# Systems Map

## Understanding the Complexity of the Overdose Crisis in B.C. and Leverage Points for Change

In 2017, 1,422 people died of a drug overdose in B.C. The B.C. Coroners' report (published January 31, 2018) shows that 4 out of 5 people who died were male and 9 out of 10 deaths occurred indoors, including more than half in private residences. First Nations are disproportionately affected by the crisis, with research from the First Nations Health Authority showing that First Nations people are five times more likely to experience an overdose event.

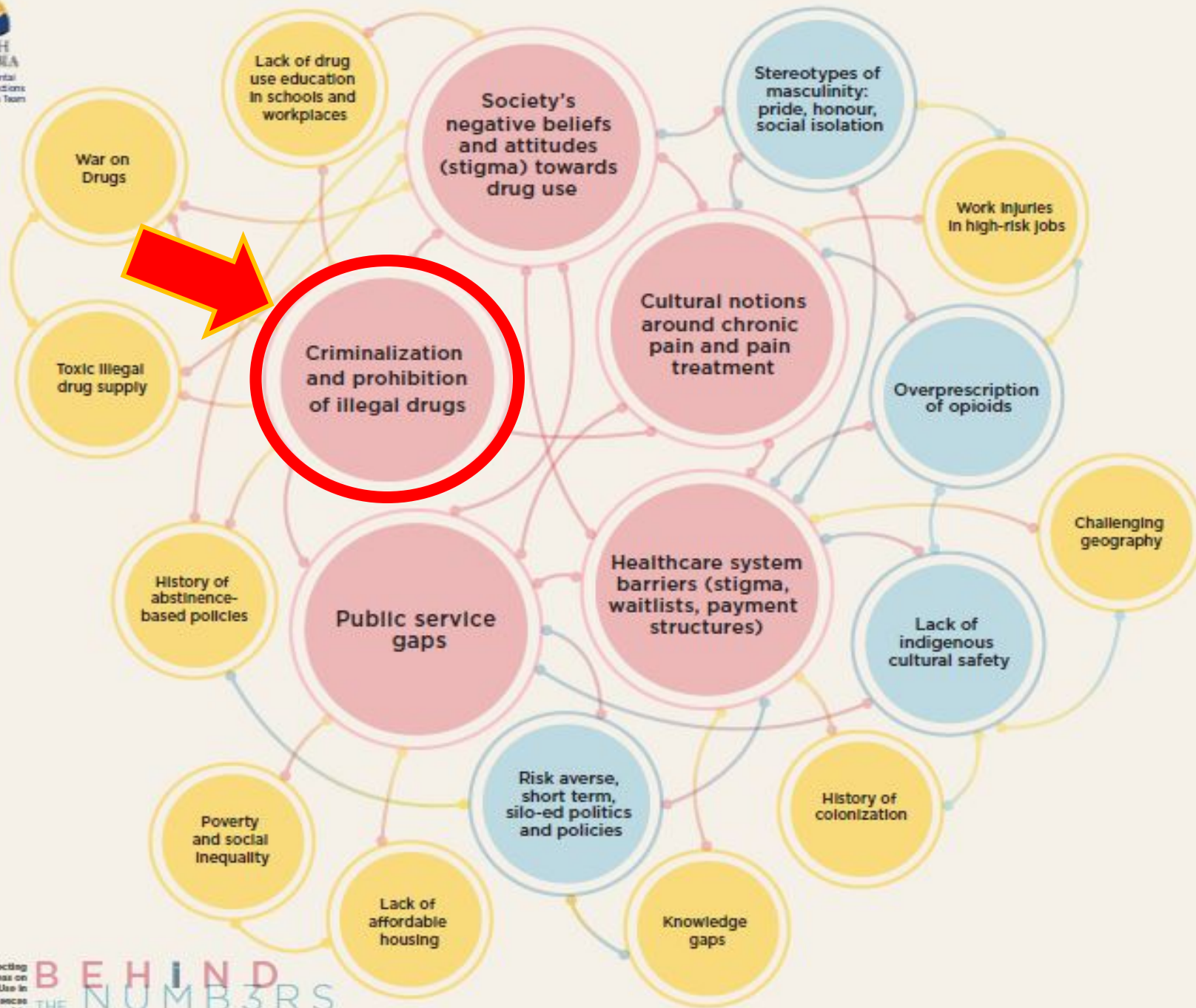
Behind these numbers, there are stories about people's lives and ideas for change. Through conversations with more than 100 people who use drugs (like heroin, cocaine, meth) and people in support provider roles, we found connections between parts of this complex problem, revealing root causes. Reframing the overdose crisis from these root causes shows the most significant leverage points for lowering overdose deaths in B.C. Collaboration among all stakeholders at these leverage points is an essential part of action and change.

### How to use this map

This map shows connections between problems. Some problems have more connections than others and can be viewed as root causes.

Think about how your initiative could influence the overdose crisis in B.C. How is it connected to other problems and what impact could it have?

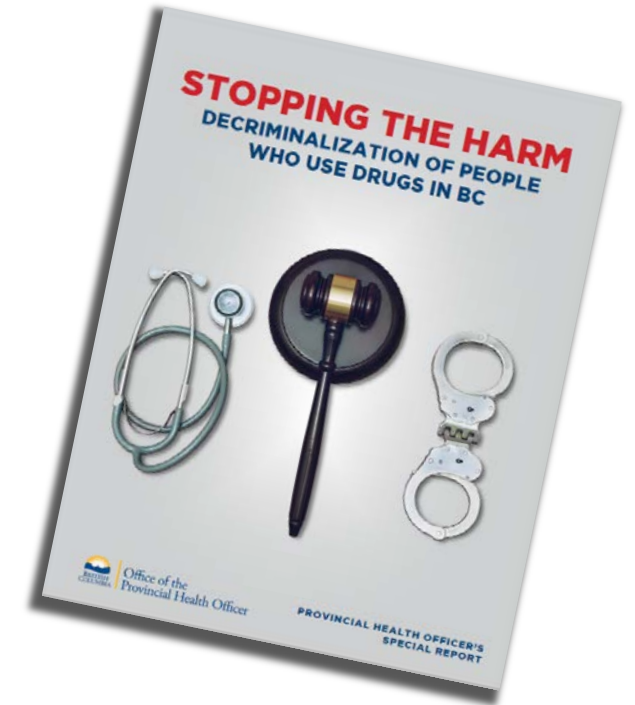
-  **7 or more connections** Pink circles show problems with the most connections to other problems. Initiatives focused here could influence multiple problems at once.
-  **4 to 6 connections** Blue circles show problems with connections to several other problems.
-  **1 to 3 connections** Yellow circles show problems with the least connections to other problems.





# PHO Special Report → *Stopping the Harm: Decriminalization of People Who Use Drugs in BC*

- Brief overview of drugs laws and policies in BC and Canada.
- Harms that criminalization has had in BC, Canada and beyond.
- Role of criminalization in the current overdose crisis.
- Options for decriminalization of people who use drugs in BC.



---

# History of Criminal Justice Approach to Drug Policy

- In Canada, there has been a long history of prohibition-based drug laws and drug policies.
- Criminal penalties for drug-related offences remain disproportionate to penalties for other, more violent crimes.
- If the intention of a prohibition-based system was to protect individuals from harms related to substance use, it has not succeeded.
- There has been global recognition that not only has the “war on drugs” failed—it has actually done more harm than good.

---

# Harms Associated with a Prohibition and Criminal Justice Approach to Drug Policy

- Greater harms are experienced by women.
- Impediment to public health harm-reduction initiatives.
- Persistent personal, social and structural stigma.
- Lucrative illegal drug market.
- Increased incarceration of non-violent, low-level offenders.
- Economic costs.



---

## **PHO Recommendation:**

**Decriminalization of people who are in possession of controlled drugs for personal use.**

# Conclusion





**Del Manak, Chief Constable**  
**Victoria Police Department**





BRITISH COLUMBIA  
CENTRE ON  
**SUBSTANCE USE**

*Networking researchers, educators & care providers*

**KEITH AHAMAD MD CCFP (AM) ISAM**

Medical Director, Regional Addiction Program

**Vancouver Coastal Health**

Clinical Scientist

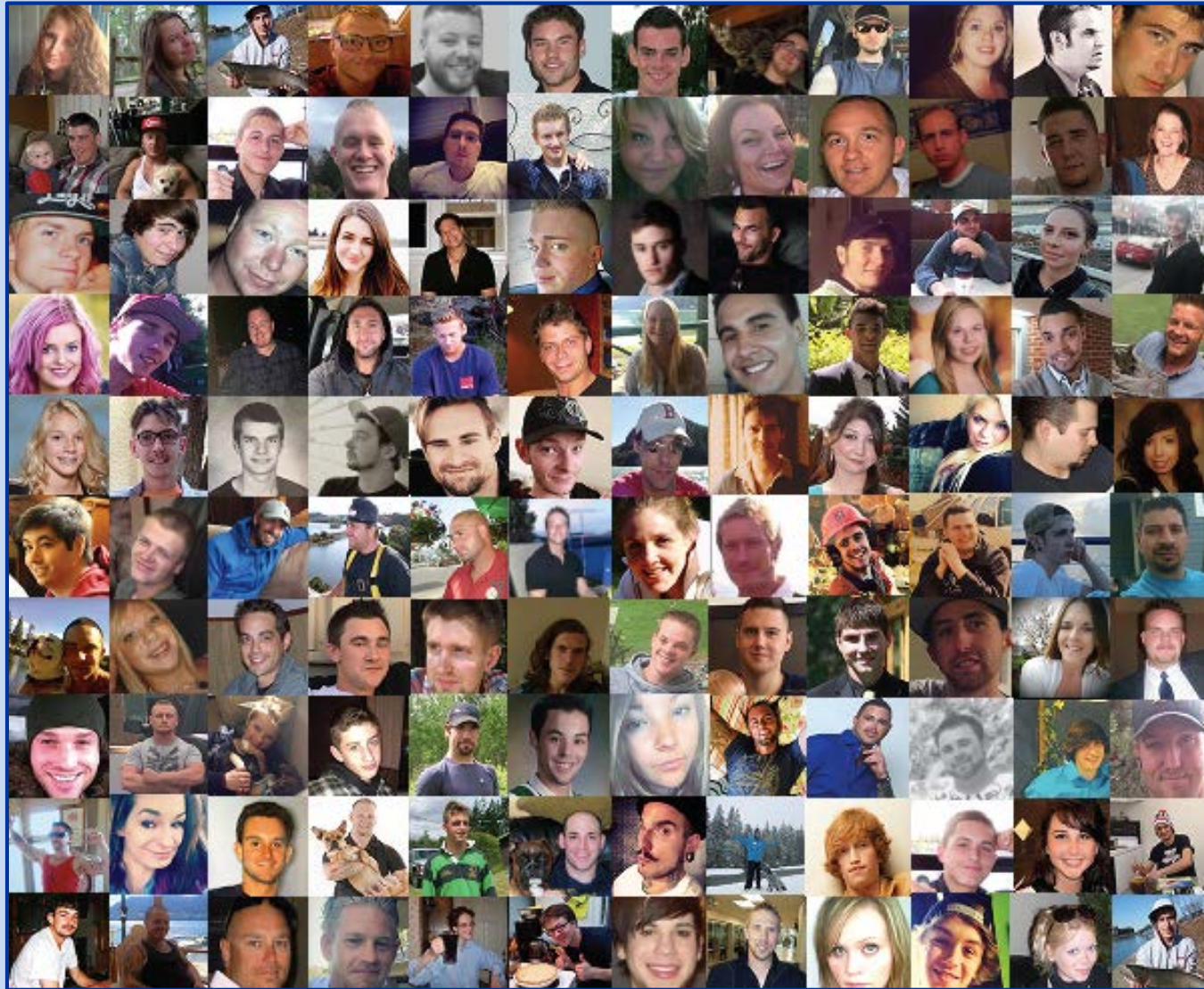
**BC Centre on Substance Use**

Clinical Assistant Professor

**University of British Columbia**



# MOMS STOP THE HARM



**Leslie McBain**

**Founder of  
Moms Stop the Harm**

# Questions?

Visit the report online:

[www.health.gov.bc.ca/pho](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/pho)

## **Office of the Provincial Health Officer**

4<sup>th</sup> Floor, 1515 Blanshard St.

Victoria BC V8W 3C8

Phone: 250-952-1330



Office of the  
Provincial Health Officer