



Canada's Opioid Crisis: What You Should Know

The opioid crisis is a complex public health issue devastating the lives of many Canadians and their families who are experiencing accidental overdose or death from opioids.



WHY THE OPIOID CRISIS MATTERS

In 2020, the opioid crisis claimed the lives of 4,395 people in Canada. That's equivalent to 12 opioid-related deaths per day.

96% of opioid-related deaths are accidental. ¹



THE OPIOID CRISIS IS DRIVEN BY COMPLEX FACTORS

Some of these factors include:

- **Contaminated illegal drug supply:** The illegal drug supply is being increasingly contaminated with fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid that increases the risk of accidental overdose. This contamination is currently the leading cause of opioid-related deaths in Canada.
- **Prescription opioids:** Opioids are mainly prescribed to relieve short- and long-term pain. While there are benefits of taking opioids, there are also risks. High rates of opioid prescribing in the past have contributed to increased exposure to opioids and their potential risks.
- **Opioid tolerance and dependence:** Long-term use of prescription opioids can lead to tolerance, meaning higher or more frequent doses are needed to feel the same effects. This pattern of use can cause your body to become dependent on opioids and can develop into an opioid use disorder. If you stop taking opioids for any period of time, your tolerance can rapidly decrease, which means that taking a dose you previously used can be fatal.

Accidental exposure to or consumption of fentanyl in ways other than is prescribed can have serious health consequences, including death. You can't know how much fentanyl has been mixed into illegal drugs because you can't see, smell or taste it. Just a few grains of fentanyl can be fatal.

THE OPIOID CRISIS IMPACTS US ALL

Substance use disorder or addiction is a treatable medical condition, not a choice.

Stigma creates barriers that prevent people who use substances from seeking and receiving the care and support they need. Be kind and compassionate to people living with a substance use disorder.

¹ Government of Canada. (2020). Opioids and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada. Retrieved <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants>