Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction


Centre canadien sur les dépendances et l’usage de substances

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Can Centre on Substance Use and Addiction / Centre can sur les dépendances et l’usage de substances
Substance Use in Canada:
Updates on the opioid crisis, and emerging substance use trends

Inter-American Observatory on Drugs
Bridget Maloney-Hall
July 22, 2020
About CCSA

• **Vision:** A healthier Canadian society where evidence transforms approaches to substance use.

• **Mission:** To address issues of substance use in Canada by providing national leadership and harnessing the power of evidence to generate coordinated action.

• **Value Proposition:** Provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.

• National non-profit organization with a pan-Canadian and international role.
Strategic Core Functions

- Providing National Leadership
  Create a common focus and purpose to achieve collective impact

- Advancing Research
  Synthesize and generate timely evidence to inform practice and policies

- Building Strategic Partnerships
  Bring people and knowledge together to develop collective responses and coordinated action

- Mobilizing Knowledge
  Expand the reach and adoption of new and emerging practices
Agenda

• About Canada

• The opioid crisis in Canada

• Emerging drug use trends

• The impacts of COVID-19
About Canada
About Canada

~35 million

2nd largest country in the world

six different time zones

13 provinces and territories

large differences in data collection on drug use across provinces

Cannabis legalized in November 2017
The Opioid Crisis in Canada
The recent numbers

- Since 2016:
  - >15,000 deaths
  - >19,000 hospitalizations

- In 2017, while opioids accounted for **6.8% of deaths** (5,084 deaths), they were responsible for 29.5% of all potential years of productive life lost (99,836 PYPLLs)

Sources:
The last 10 years

Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths by Month, British Columbia, Canada, 2010-2019

Multiple, complex factors that include, but not limited to:

- Prescription opioid crisis
  - A misunderstanding of the addictive risk of prescription opioids;
  - Frequent opioid prescribing and high amounts being prescribed for pain relief;
  - Lack of awareness or access to alternative treatments for pain;
  - Use of prescription opioids by individuals to whom they are not prescribed, such as friends and family members;
  - Lack of access to prescription opioids leading to illicit opioid use;
- Psychological, social and biological risk factors like genetics, mental health, early life experiences, trauma, poverty, lack of secure housing and other social determinants of health;
- Stigma towards substance use disorders;
- Unpredictable illegal drug supply
Fentanyl and its analogues

- 2014: alert posted on fentanyl appearing in counterfeit oxycodone tablets
- 2016: fentanyl (and analogues, such as carfentanil) is found in 49% opioid-related deaths
- 2019: fentanyl is found in 75% of opioid-related deaths

Sources:

Canada’s Four-Pillar Response

- **Prevention**
  - Gradual deprescribing based on evidence
- **Treatment**
  - Increasing access to opioid agonist therapy (OAT)
- **Harm Reduction**
  - More safer consumption sites (SCS) and overdose prevention sites
- **Enforcement**
  - Changes to *Customs Act*
  - Introduction of the *Good Samaritan Act*
Some good news?

Source:
Emerging Drug Use Trends
CCENDU Bulletin

Changes in Stimulant Use and Related Harms: Focus on Methamphetamine and Cocaine

Summary

In response to recent reports of increasing harms related to methamphetamine use in Canada, this bulletin summarizes recent changes in stimulant-related harms in Canadian communities. It is intended for a broad audience of health professionals, law enforcement, harm reduction and health service providers, policy makers, and people who use drugs.

The stimulants causing the greatest harms in Canada are methamphetamine and cocaine powder and crack cocaine.

- Methamphetamine availability and harms associated with use are increasing, especially in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

- Cocaine and crack cocaine are still widely used by people who use drugs. However, in some areas of the country, availability, use and harms associated with cocaine appear to be decreasing, and in some cases are being replaced by availability, use and harms associated methamphetamine.
Stimulant harms are increasing

Change in hospitalizations rates between 2015 and 2017

+17% For cocaine
+31% For other CNS stimulants (methamphetamine)


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CCENDU Bulletin

Adulterants, Contaminants and Co-occurring Substances in Drugs on the Illegal Market in Canada

Summary

The inherent risks of substance use are significantly increased for drugs procured on the illegal market, as there is no quality control and drug contents are unpredictable. This bulletin provides a snapshot of drug contents on the illegal market in Canada, with the view to raising awareness among people who use drugs, service providers and policy makers that drug contamination is extensive and pervasive, and contributes significantly to drug-related harms. Key findings are described below.

Drugs on the illegal market tend to contain unexpected substances.

- Opioids and stimulants were accompanied by other psychoactive substances in 5% to 13% of samples analyzed by Health Canada’s Drug Analysis Service (DAS) (up to 69% when including cutting agents).
- This co-occurrence was often unexpected, as noted by drug checking services and a study comparing self-reported drug use to urinalysis results.
Co-occurring substances in opioids

- Fentanyl + analogues in 62% of opioid-containing samples
- Other psychoactive substances (13%): methamphetamine, cocaine, benzodiazepines, synthetic cannabinoids
Co-occurring substances in stimulants

- Fentanyl + analogues in 3% of stimulant-containing samples
- Other psychoactive substances (5-15%): other stimulants, diphenhydramine, opioids, benzodiazepines, synthetic cannabinoids
COVID-19
Summary of Circumstances

- People are using drugs that are more toxic
- People can’t access or afford their regular supply
- People may have reduced tolerance due to (involuntary) abstinence
- People are using in isolation
- Fewer direct services available

Reference:
Health Consequences

• Drug poisoning reports ↑
  – Toronto: 3 alerts March, April, May
    • Cluster of suspected opioid poisonings from smoking crack
    • April: 343 opioid OD calls, 25 deaths – highest number since September 2017
  – B.C.: May 21 Provincial Overdose Alert
    • Increased toxicity related to both stimulants and “down”
    • April coroner data: 117 drug toxicity deaths – 39% increase over April 2019 and 4% increase over March 2020 (112)

• Reports of increasing drug-involved deaths in single-occupancy rooms and other residences
Sure enough … tragedy

Possible Response Options

• Access to a more reliable and safer drug supply
  – Health Canada exemption changes:
    • Facilitate prescribing and providing controlled substances
    • Allow adjustments to service operations (supervised consumption, drug checking, etc.) to allow for distancing
  – B.C. interim clinical guidance on implementation

• Access to harm reduction services and tools
  – Universal access to naloxone
  – Ensure harm reduction services are deemed essential and have resources to comply with physical distancing guidelines

• Access to virtual care and harm reduction options
Resources
Resources

Opioids


• Opioid resources, organized by the CDSS pillars: https://www.ccsa.ca/opioid-resources

• Opioid-related harms in Canada: https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids/

Emerging Drug Trends

• Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms (CSUCH) study: www.csuch.ca

• Stimulant Use and Related Harms

• Adulterants, Contaminants, and Co-Occurring Substances in Drugs on the Illegal Market in Canada

• Early warning: Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (CCENDU): https://www.ccsa.ca/ccendu

COVID-19 and Substance Use


• Changes Related to COVID-19 Related to the Illegal Drug Supply:
Questions and Comments
Contact Information

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