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# BC's Toxic Drug Emergency

*November 15, 2022*





# The Impact of the Toxic Drug Emergency

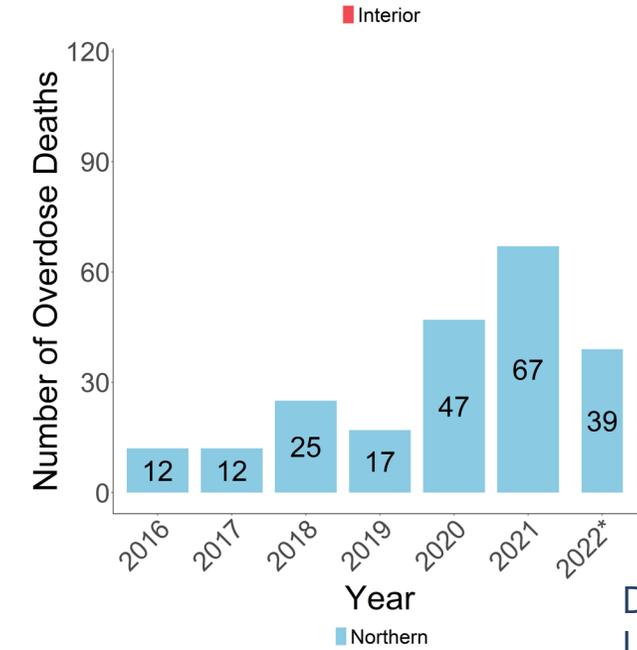
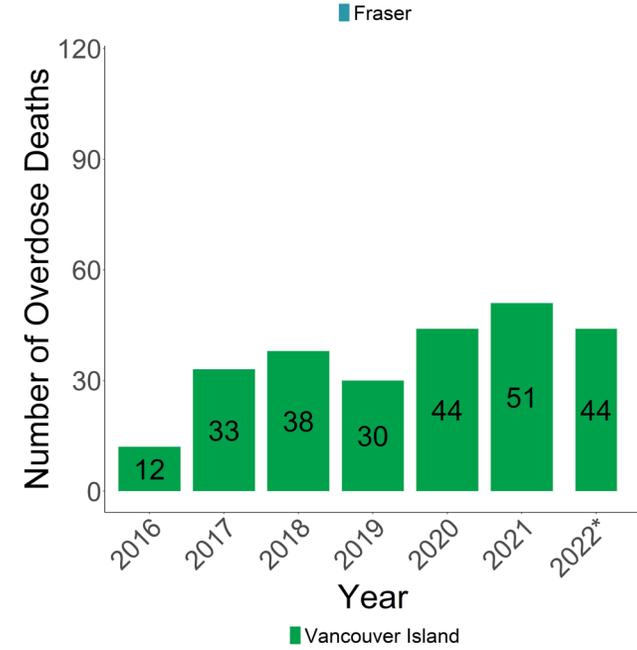
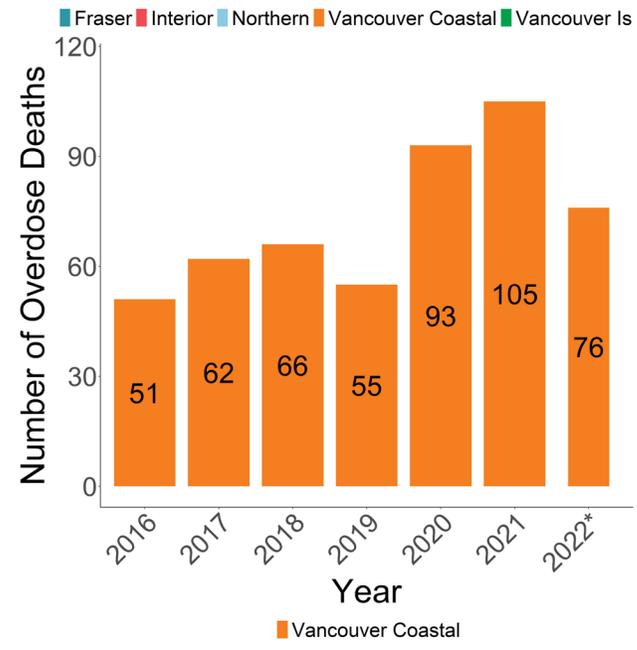
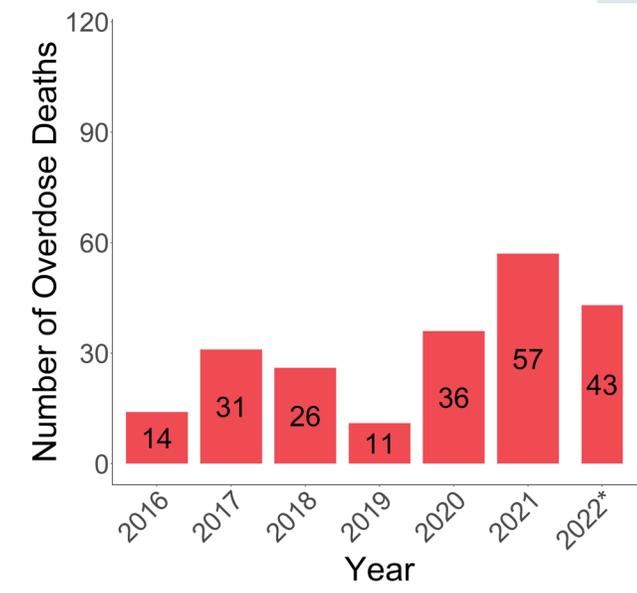
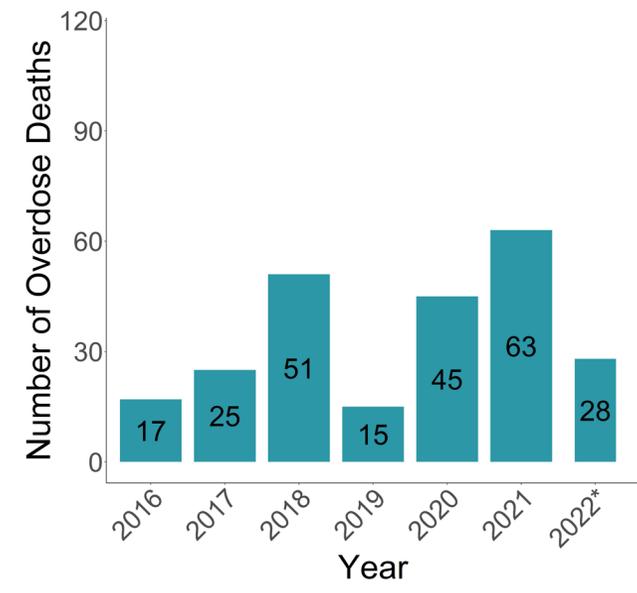
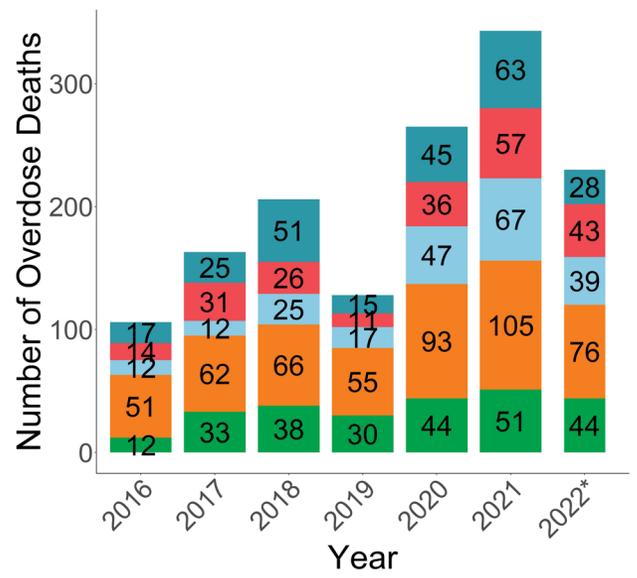
- In the six years since BC declared a public health emergency, First Nations communities across BC have lost too many loved ones to an increasingly poisoned drug supply. This loss of life is now more than 1300 family members and friends.
- First Nations people are disproportionately impacted. The significant gap between First Nations and non-First Nations people has been consistent throughout the public health emergency.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic compounded risks and harms for people who use substances, drug poisoning event and death rates increased dramatically.



# First Nations Drug Toxicity Deaths by Year and Region



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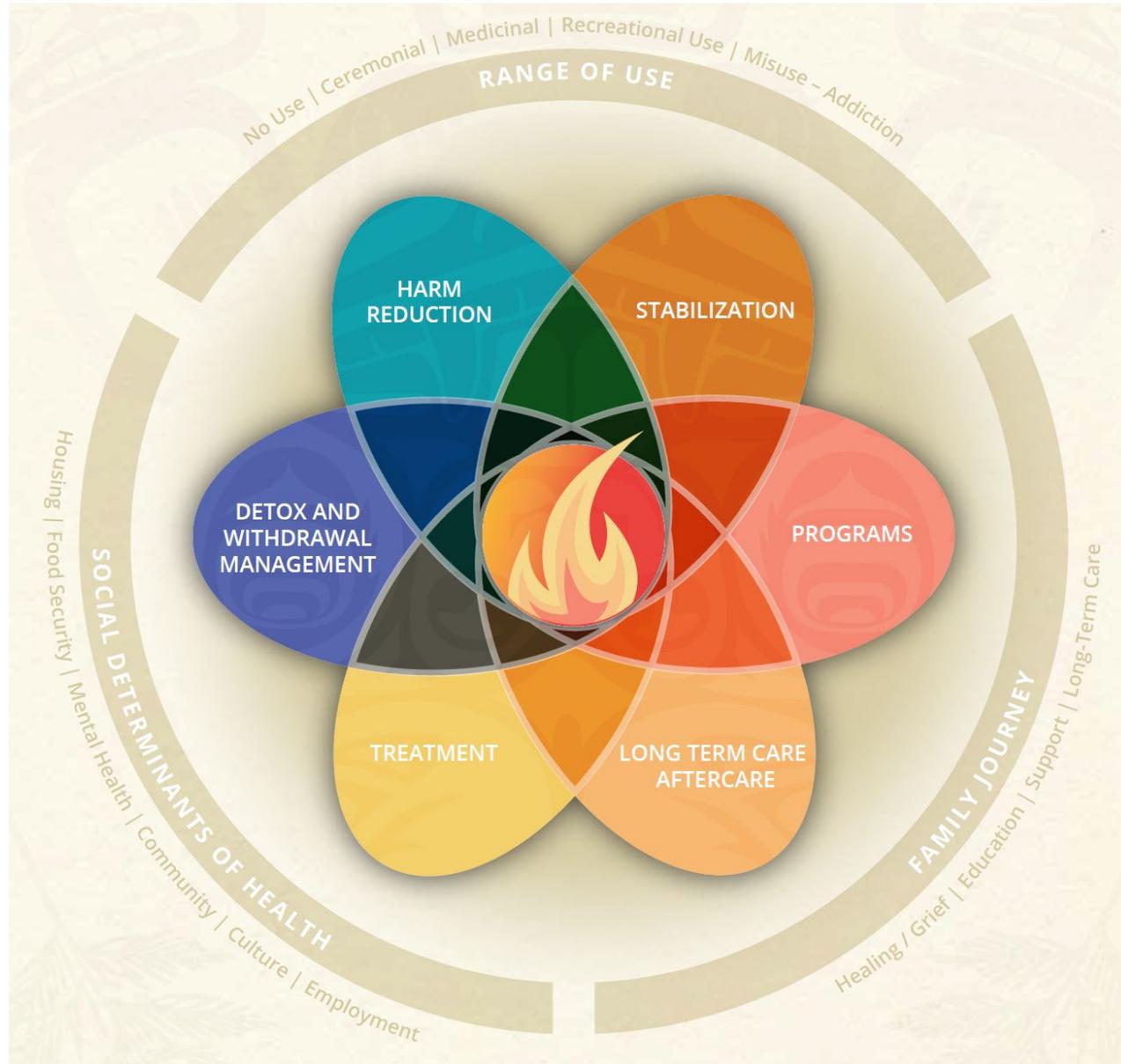
**Information is NOT for publication or further dissemination**

Data Source: BCCS-FNCF Linkage  
August 2022



# Update from Coroner's report July 2022

- The total of 192 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths in July 2022 represents a 4% decrease over the number of deaths in July 2021 (199) and is a 31% increase from the number of deaths occurring in June 2022 (147).
- The number of illicit drug toxicity deaths in July 2022 equates to about 6.2 deaths per day.
- In 2022, 71% of those dying were aged 30 to 59, and 78% were male.
- In 2022, 84% of illicit drug toxicity deaths occurred inside (57% in private residences and 27% in other inside residences including social and supportive housing, SROs, shelters, and hotels and other indoor locations) and 15% occurred outside in vehicles, sidewalks, streets, parks, etc. (see page 5).
- No deaths have been reported at supervised consumption or drug overdose prevention sites.



## All Paths Lead to Wellness

This helps show how work needs to be done in all the areas to support people where they are while they are determining what their wellness journey will look like.

Our job right now is to help people stay alive so they can take the steps that they are ready for.

# Framework for Action - Ongoing Initiatives



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## SYSTEM-WIDE TOXIC DRUG PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY RESPONSE FOR FIRST NATIONS IN BC

4

ACTION  
AREAS

- Prevent people who overdose from dying
  - Injectable and nasal naloxone, community grants
- Keep people safe when using substances
  - Community train-the-trainer sessions, Indigenous peer support in communities and in urban centres
- Create an accessible range of treatment options
  - Opioid agonist therapy, land based healing, First Nations treatment centres
- Support people on their healing journeys
  - Harm reduction education, community-based wrap around teams, supporting people transitioning from correctional facilities



# FNHA's expanded response initiatives

- Established **Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service**: provides assessment, referral, treatment planning, and withdrawal management guidance
- **Added regional capacity**: Addictions Specialists, Harm Reduction Educators, Peer Coordinators, and Child and Youth Care Community Coordinators
- Developed **Indigenous Harm Reduction Community Council** – a BC-wide network of Indigenous people working on Indigenous approaches to harm reduction
- Established Harm Reduction Hub to provide direct access to naloxone and other harm reduction supplies
- Expanding **supports for people experiencing grief and loss** from the passing of loved ones including **healing grants** to mark International Overdose Awareness Day
- Engaging with communities to assess need for **pharmaceutical alternatives to poisoned drugs** (“safer supply”) by First Nations people at risk of overdose

# Next Steps in Response



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- **Moving to a Level 2 Emergency Response** – in alignment with FNHA's Emergency and Disaster Management and Business Continuity Policy
  - Enhanced coordination including onboarding teams with special skill sets/areas of expertise
  - Mobilization and re-assignment of resources or services required to support response
  - Work with partners to ensure communities can access culturally safe supports and services
- CEO has offered FNHA support to host community, Nation, cultural family and/or regional **workouts to identify gaps and enhance planning and action**
- **Expand harm reduction education and strengthen community capacity**
- Work with province and regional health authorities to **allocate regional detox and treatment beds to specifically support rapid access for First Nations people**
- Identify existing and new funds to **enhance response in communities**



## Example of Response in case of toxic drugs in an area

- **Creating/supporting Peer Networks**
  - Share information/education
  - Be part of safe using plans
  - Informal network to stay on top of what is going on
- **Drug alerts**
  - In partnership with Health Authorities
  - Peer alerts using peer networks
  - Community using social media to share message
- **Providing harm reduction supplies, even for those who don't see themselves as drug users**
- **Knowing how to set up an episodic overdose prevention site if needed**
- **Naloxone training**
  - Having naloxone (both injectable and nasal naloxone available)

Do you have any tools to add to this list?



## FNHA resources

- Harm Reduction Hub
  - Harm reduction planning support
  - Bulk Nasal Naloxone orders
  - Other harm reduction supplies such as drug testing strips.
- Peer Coordinator/ Peer Engagement
- 4 Directions Team
  - Opioid Agonist therapy (OAT)
  - Not Just Naloxone training
  - Nurse Prescribing
- Grants
- Courageous conversations
- Doctor of the Day (Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatric services)
- Situation reports and source of data
- Public source of information sheets, resource materials and connecting with partners
- Regional Teams
  - Addiction Specialist(s)
  - Harm Reduction Educators
  - Health Emergency Management Support
  - Nurse Prescriber support

# Website overview

The screenshot shows the website's header with navigation links: "What We Do", "Wellness", "Benefits", and "About". The main content area is titled "Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction". On the left, a sidebar menu lists various services, with "Mental Health and Substance Use" expanded to show "Harm Reduction" options like "Get Informed", "Get Help", and "Support Others". The main content features a video player with a play button and a "Watch on YouTube" link. Below the video is an "Introduction" section with text about drug use as a health issue and a link to the "FNHA Harm Reduction Hub". To the right of the text are four large, colorful buttons: "GET INFORMED" (orange), "GET HELP" (red), "SUPPORT OTHERS" (blue), and "TREATMENT CENTRES" (green). At the bottom, there is a "Decriminalization" section and a "Please Note" disclaimer.

- <https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use/overdose-information>
- Situation reports
- Harm reduction policy
- FAQ's
- Most current information

# Remembering and Honouring Loved Ones Lost to the Toxic Drug Crisis



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- Safe and welcoming digital space to remember, honour and grieve loved ones lost to the toxic drug crisis
- Sharing of videos, photos, artwork or an audio recording are all welcome
- For each loved one honoured a tree will be planted in a dedicated area in the health region where the storytellers live

<https://honouringourlovedones.fnha.ca/>

# Decriminalization of people who use drugs in BC



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- On May 31, Health Canada approved BC's request for decriminalization of certain drugs: opioids (e.g. heroin and fentanyl), cocaine (powder/crack), MDMA, and methamphetamines
- Begins January 31, 2023 for an initial 3 year period
- Before that date, Health Canada requires BC to "uphold the spirit and principles of reconciliation under the *BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and continue to consult with Indigenous governments, communities, partners and experts when working towards the implementation"
- Once in effect, adults 18+ will be allowed to possess up to 2.5 grams of illegal substances (total weight), without being subject to fines, arrest or drug seizures
- **Decriminalization is not legalization.** Trafficking of drugs will remain illegal; there will not be government-approved systems for manufacturing and selling of drugs

# Making Sense of Decriminalization



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- Decriminalization creates a shift for those who use substances from a criminal justice response to a public health response – this is especially significant for Indigenous/First Nations people who are disproportionately impacted in the criminal justice system
- Decriminalization alone will not directly prevent toxic drug poisoning events or deaths
- For people who use substances, decriminalization involves enhancing efforts to address the shame, stigma, stereotyping & discrimination around substance use
- The police officer: person encounter will involve the transfer of health system information
- As FNHA, we are not implementing decrim, rather, our role is to support conversations with communities to explore what this means for them – we seek to listen and understand



## Regional contacts

- Northern region: [Jim.Campbell@fnha.ca](mailto:Jim.Campbell@fnha.ca) , Manager, Mental Health and Wellness
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