



# About Canada's Opioid Crisis

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Illegal drugs and problematic drug or substance use are not new in Canada. However, the opioid crisis has had a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities across Canada. Since 2016, there have been more than 12,800 apparent opioid-related deaths. In 2018 one life was lost every two hours due to opioids. Many others have been hospitalized because of an opioid overdose.

## The numbers tell us that:

- the opioid crisis continues to grow
- 93% of opioid overdose deaths happen by accident
- young Canadians aged 15 to 24 are the fastest-growing population requiring hospital care from opioid overdoses.

## How are illegal opioids driving the crisis?

Canada's street drugs have become tainted with powerful opioids, such as fentanyl. This is leading to a high rate of overdoses and deaths. Fake pills are being produced using unknown amounts of fentanyl. As well, sometimes drugs that are made illegally may accidentally contain fentanyl when produced on surfaces and equipment contaminated with fentanyl. You can't see, taste or smell fentanyl, and a few grains of salt worth of fentanyl can be enough to kill you.

## Are Canada's prescription opioids contributing to the crisis?

The opioid crisis is a complex issue. Illegal drugs with fentanyl added to them are causing many of the opioid-related harms and deaths. However, prescription opioids have also contributed to the crisis. While opioids offer benefits, they also come with risks. High rates of opioid prescribing mean that more people are being exposed to the risks of opioids, including dependence, substance use disorder (addiction) and overdose.



## The federal government has been working with partners to address the crisis by:

- ✓ **Making naloxone kits** available for free and without a prescription in most provinces and territories
- ✓ **Making training** available for everyone on proper use of Naloxone Kits
- ✓ **Protecting people who call for help when an overdose occurs** from minor drug possession charges through the **Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act**
- ✓ **Increasing access to treatment** services in provinces and territories
- ✓ **Distributing wallet cards across Canada** to raise awareness about the signs of an overdose and what to do during an overdose
- ✓ **Raising awareness about stigma** to reduce barriers to treatment and health and social services for people who use drugs
- ✓ **Approving supervised consumption sites and allowing provinces and territories to quickly set up overdose prevention sites** to reduce harms associated with drug use and to prevent death