
BACKGROUND

Escalated overdose response actions 2020-21

The Province stepped up B.C.'s overdose response even further in 2020-21 in response to the dramatic increase in drug toxicity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enhancing Treatment and Recovery

New Beds for Addictions and Recovery Care. Doubling the number of youth treatment beds, and 100+ new adult treatment beds being added throughout the province. In August 2020, 20 new youth beds were also added in Chilliwack at the Traverse facility.

Expanded scope of nursing practice. Thirty nurses have completed their first round of training and will begin prescribing medication for opioid use disorder this month. This follows Dr Henry's order to allow registered nurses (RNs) and registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs) to prescribe controlled drugs and substances, to reach people who are underserved

Expanded opioid agonist treatment. The number of people on opioid agonist treatment (OAT) has grown to more than 23,500 and the number of clinicians prescribing any form of opioid agonist treatment in a given month increased from 773 in June 2017 to 1,622 in November 2020. We have also significantly expanded access through Rapid Access to Addictions Care Clinics in all health regions so that more people can access the care they need, where and when they need it.

More Flexible Treatment Options. We have more options than ever – including Injectable Opioid Agonist Treatment (iOAT), and low barrier pharmaceutical alternatives (TiOAT) programs in most health authorities in B.C. In 2019-20, iOAT capacity increased by more than 40%. In November 2019, government approved the expansion of TiOAT into every health authority in the province.

Better, Safer Care in Supportive Recovery. Increased mandatory requirements including expanded training for staff, and higher per diem rates for supportive recovery providers.

Funding for Supportive Recovery Operators. \$2.5 million in funding flowed to 53 existing residential treatment and recovery service providers whose budgets have been strained by the COVID-19 pandemic, making sure they can continue delivering quality care for those who need it.

Improving the Substance Use System of Care

New ACT teams. Adding six teams in Vancouver, Victoria, Maple Ridge/Mission, Kelowna, Nanaimo, and Cowichan Valley/Duncan. This will bring the provincial total of ACT teams to 30.

New Teams to Keep People Connected to Services and Treatment. Seven new and nine expanded substance use teams throughout the province to help people stay connected to health care services, treatment, and recovery.

New and Expanded Outreach Teams. 42 new full-time registered nurses, psychiatric nurses, social workers, and peer support workers are being added to 14 new and existing interdisciplinary outreach teams throughout the province. This expands access to substance use services to prevent overdose deaths, save lives, and connect more people to treatment and recovery.

Significant Expansion of Mental Health and Addictions Counselling. Through Community Counselling grants, and support to go virtual during COVID-19.

Risk Mitigation Prescriber Guidance

In March 2020, the Province announced new clinical guidance for health-care providers to stem the spread of COVID-19 and respond to the ongoing overdose emergency. Since March when the province first announced the new clinical guidance, there has been a 395% increase (from 677 to 3,348 people) in the number of people dispensed hydromorphone in December 2020 compared to March 2020.

24/7 helpline for prescribers and pharmacists. Provides live, in-the-moment support to doctors, pharmacists, and nurse practitioners while they are treating patients with opioid use disorder and considering safe prescription alternatives to the toxic drug supply.

Preventing Overdoses

Overdose Prevention and Supervised Consumption Services. Opening 17 new supervised consumption services and 12 new inhalation services in communities hit hardest by the overdose crisis. During COVID-19, all of these sites have been declared essential services, and government has supported the sites to stay open with new COVID-19 measures to help give people the confidence that they can continue to use these services safely during the pandemic. Since they were opened these locations have played a critical role in connecting people to service options and have had more than 2 million visits, over 11,000 overdoses responded to and survived, and zero deaths.

Lifeguard App. The free app helps to save lives by automatically connecting people who use drugs to first responders if they become unresponsive. Since its launch in late May 2020, the app has been used more than 17,000 times by more than 3,000 app users and in at least 13 instances, the person using the App became non-responsive - and BCEHS dispatchers sent paramedics to care for them and take them to hospital. To date no overdose deaths have been reported through the App. Lifeguard also now provides drug alerts.

Take Home Naloxone Kits. In 2020 more than 270,000 kits were shipped and nearly 79,000 have been reported as used to reverse an overdose since the program started (as of Jan. 20, 2021). Available at more than 1,800 locations, including 752 community pharmacies in B.C.

Federal Funding for Safer Supply Projects \$15 million in new funding over four years for three projects in Vancouver and one on Vancouver Island.

- Vancouver Coastal Health Authority Safer Alternative for Emergency Response (SAFER) Initiative (\$5M over four years)
- Providence Health Care Research Institute and BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (\$3.6 million over three years)
- Kilala Lelum Health Centre/Urban Indigenous Health and Healing Cooperative (\$2.8 million over three years)
- AVI Health and Community Services Society Victoria Safer Alternatives for Emergency Response project (\$4 million over three years)

These innovative projects will provide pharmaceutical-grade medication as an alternative to the toxic illicit drug supply for people in Vancouver and in the Cowichan Valley who have not responded to other forms of treatment for opioid use disorder.

Community Response

Community Crisis Innovation Fund. Supports community-driven, innovative strategies and actions that draw on the expertise of local service providers and people with lived experience.

Grants totalling \$1.6 million. Will be provided to escalate the overdose response in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities and to provide supports including groups for grief and loss, family services, and networks for people and families impacted by the overdose crisis.

Community Action Teams (CAT). \$2.5 million in funding to maintain these services in B.C. communities. The 36 CATs in high priority communities throughout the province help communities form partnerships and strategies to address the overdose crisis at a local level.

People with lived/living experience. Continued investments to ensure people with lived and living experience are involved in building a provincial network of people who use drugs to share that experience and expertise as well as funding for peer and family support networks. Moms Stop the Harm (MSTH) – B.C. is leading Stronger Together, a provincial family support and development project.

Facility Overdose Response Box program. Provides community organizations with naloxone, supplies and training so staff can recognize and respond to overdose. There are currently 661 registered sites in the province and 1,789 overdose reversals reported from FORB sites (as of Jan. 20, 2021).

Indigenous-led solutions

\$20 million provided by B.C. to support the First Nations Health Authority with the replacement of First Nation-run treatment centres throughout B.C.

\$29 million was provided by BC to the First Nations Health Authority to support the design and expansion of land-based and culturally safe treatment services. As part of this initiative, the First Nations Health Authority has provided funding to First Nations to increase the number of treatment options available to First Nation clients with a focus on land-based, family-based, or group-based treatment services.

The Province of B.C., the Government of Canada, and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) committed \$30 million to support the implementation of a new tripartite partnership for mental health and wellness.

Provincial Overdose Emergency Response for First Nations communities. \$24 million over three years to support the First Nations Health Authority with the overdose emergency response with an increased focus on addressing the impact of the emergency on First Nations people living in urban centres.

Métis-led mental health and wellness initiatives. \$1.13 million provided to the Métis Nation BC to support Métis-led mental health and wellness initiatives, including the development of a cultural safety and wellness curriculum and a harm reduction and anti-stigma campaign.