



## FAST FACTS ABOUT OPIOID OVERDOSES

BC Illicit Opiod deaths (2020)	BC COVID 19 related deathe (2020)
1716	1400

**69% - The number of opioid overdose deaths occurring in young people between the ages of 30 and 59.**

**74% - The increase in opioid overdose deaths in the province in the past year.**

**100% - The increase in the number of EHS calls related to opioid overdose over the past year. Trends are the same on the Sunshine Coast and Powell River.**

**When the deaths on the Coast were analyzed, it was discovered that it was mainly people who weren't accessing care.**

## Four Ways the Community Can Help Decrease Opioid Deaths.

1. Encourage people to access treatment for their opiod use. Once people step into the clinic their risk of dying drops significantly.
2. Local businesses and public spaces should have and learn how to use life saving Narcan kits.
3. Families who have a family member that uses opioids should have and learn how to use life saving Narcan kits.
4. Should someone be a witness to an overdose, calling 911 early should be the priority as well as administering Narcan if available.

Narcan kits, along with instructions on how to use them, are available for free at the **Substance Use Disorder clinic located at the Sechelt Hospital.**

Harm reduction supplies, including Narcan kits, and safe use supplies such as clean needles can also be picked up from **the Pender Harbour Health Centre reception during regular business hours.**

Since its inception in June 2020, the Sunshine Coast Opioid Overdose Prevention Task Force has worked on tackling a variety of challenges including the impact of COVID-19 on the opioid overdose crisis and increasing public awareness to destigmatize opioid use.

While Sunshine Coast community members might think opioid use is a big city issue Dr. Suzanne Walter, a physician at the Substance Use Disorder Clinic and member of the task force explains "the Sunshine Coast is by no means spared, we definitely have an opioid crisis of our own here."

Although the death rate has remained steady over the past 3 years on the Sunshine Coast, with 17 per 100 000 on the Southern Coast and double that in Powell River, the number of calls the Emergency Health Services (EHS) receive has risen dramatically. Dr. Joerg Jaschinski, the physician lead at Sechelt Hospital's substance use disorder clinic and the one who oversees the task force, notes that the number of calls received in the province by the EHS this past year has increased by 100%, which also reflects the trend on the Coast.

COVID-19 has impacted the opioid crisis in several ways including affecting the supply chain of drugs coming from across the border. This has led to an extremely toxic drug supply. Dr. Walter says "the pandemic has also impacted access to care, has led to people being more isolated and using on their own as well as having significantly reduced access to support groups and treatment." Added to those challenges is the current housing crisis on the Coast and in the province. With homelessness and unemployment increasing due to COVID-19, Dr. Jaschinski believes this has also had an effect on substance use.

Stigma is another key factor that has impacted Opioid deaths. "When we talk about stigma, it has a huge impact on people accessing care because people are worried about being judged. It's important that we get rid of this stigma and treat substance use disorders more like a chronic disease, the way we would anything else. We need to normalize it and be compassionate because it's not something these people choose to struggle with," Dr. Walter explains. "We need to shift our focus provincially from a penalizing one to a more supportive model which focuses on access to support and treatment".

Substance use is often a response to emotional or physical pain with deep roots in trauma and adverse childhood events. "It's a physiological condition, something that people feel and suffer from." Dr. Jaschinski said. "The treatment (safe supply of pharmaceutical drugs) is scientifically based and counteracts the physiological discomfort that people feel."

To help address the issue, in 2020 the province released new risk mitigation guidelines that gave physicians new prescribing options as safer alternatives to the toxic illicit drug supply. Evidence based treatment introduced by the task force over the past year includes:

- peer workers that provide harm reduction and education,
- outreach workers that connect with the community in the community, and
- physicians and nurses on site in the substance use disorder clinic who provide supportive care, arrange counselling and facilitate referrals to treatment facilities.

**In response to the overdose crisis during COVID-19, the task force has also:**

- developed new guidelines for the Sechelt Hospital emergency room
- with Vancouver Coast Health created two new positions for a Sunshine Coast Overdose Outreach Team,
- opened an Overdose Prevention Site and
- extended outreach services to Gibsons and the Pender Harbour/Egmont areas. The Sunshine Coast Overdose Outreach Team now provides services out of the Pender Harbour Health Centre every other Monday.

**The Sunshine Coast Substance Use Disorder clinic is associated with Mental Health at Sechelt Hospital and can be reached weekdays at (604) 885-8678.**

