

What is the Opioid Crisis?

- Fentanyl is the leading cause of death in Canada, especially British Columbia.
- Fentanyl is a synthetic drug created in 1959 by a Belgian scientist to help as a powerful potent pain reliever.
- Initially this drug was for people with terminal illness, and it is hundred times more potent than morphine and fifty time more potent than heroine.
- It is widely used during medical procedures under supervision and normally patients are given short-term prescriptions to use such drugs because there is a thin line between pain alleviation and addiction.
- Almost 90% of people who overdosed in Canada have been from fentanyl.
- Less than 10% of people who die from an overdose can be termed as “recreational or short-term users” and the majority is from long term drug users.
- Death by illicit drug overdoses in B.C became the leading cause of unnatural deaths.
- 1500 people dead between 2016 & 2019 after declaration of public health emergency.
- What makes fentanyl so dangerous is that it has been contaminated into every street drug that we have.
 - Mixed in with meth, cocaine, heroin and beyond.

Who is affected by this epidemic?

- The drug epidemic does not discriminate regardless of race, background, and status. Whether you're from wealthy families or low-income neighbourhoods.
- There are stories from the BC mobile response team who are the front lines of the epidemic helping people. Some of the facts we can gather include:
 - We have professional who are also hooked on drugs and this issue crosses no bounds.
 - In this case people on the frontlines who are on prescribed medication can't work and earn a paycheque if they're on some prescribed potent drug.
 - To get back to work so they can earn money, they get off the drug, and then they turn to the drug dealers they're trying to get off the street to purchase some illicit drugs to help their pain.
- This is the story with many people when physicians stop writing prescriptions for them. They turn to the illegal market.

What goes on with drug users and what they go through?

- Users have a combination of genetics, inter-generational trauma, childhood trauma or trauma of some sort and debilitating medical conditions.
- Drugs are criminalized and there is a stigmatism, so most users do it alone because of shame.
- When people do it in pairs or groups it's mostly long term users banding together and no one is calling a responder because everyone is likely to have overdosed.
- A judge has even said that most people have seen their mothers been murdered by their fathers and being left with the body for days.
- However, we see that there is a sense of belonging and family within this community of drug users.
- Listening to the Crackdown Podcast and watching a clip done by VICE news "[Benzo Dope and Tranq: The next wave of the overdose Crisis](#)" you can feel that they want to be seen as people and be accepted as part the greater, everyday community.
- Drug users' family members are even surprised that they are contributors to society and activism because they have given up on them in most cases or have lost contact.
- We see an underlying theme of stints in jail over long stretches for doing drugs and committing other crimes. VANDU members think this could be alleviated by help from the government in giving them pills to avoid them stealing, buying drugs that have been cooked in weird labs and then overdosing.
- We also meet Greg who was a pillar in the community. In his speech, Greg, says they're constantly being bullied by Vancouver PD and money being stolen from them.
- In his case he had taken to change in helping his new found community. He pushed for better treatment from clinics around the crosstown and east-van downtown area.

Where does the law come in and what are they doing?

- Current drugs laws were created over a 100 years ago and have not been amended. In those days you were seen as a moral failure.
- Politically speaking people and the government have been muted about this. People see it as their fault for doing this.
- As Ben Perrin's quote from his book, on [The Curious Task](#) states "Most people don't care about quote-on-quote addicts, a hurtful and stigmatising label. Overdosing from illegal drugs they believe that drug users are to blame for harming themselves by quote-on-quote choosing to use these dangerous substances in the first place. If they overdose and die, it's their own damn fault. It's a harsh form of victim blaming that I started to notice in conversations with even some friends and family members and it has roots thoroughly debunked but persistent theories about why people use illicit drugs."
- However, we see that governments starts a 'war on drugs.' This meant that if you crack down on supply it drives up the price and hopefully it stops people from using.
- Since 1990 there has been an increase in seizures on heroin, cocaine, and marijuana.
- What happened is that while law enforcement was performing global drug seizures, we prices decreased by 81% (cocaine 80% and cannabis 86%).
- Purity also increased substantially as we see cocaine went up by 11% and cannabis went up by over 100%.
- It was so costly for suppliers when their drugs got ceased and they became innovative.
- Suppliers are now sending less bulk and increasing the potency and made use of buffers to make more quantities when the drugs arrived at their destination.
- However as of recently "Canada's government has announced that it will allow the province of British Columbia to try a three-year experiment in decriminalizing possession of small amounts of drugs, hoping it will help stem a record number of overdose deaths by easing a fear of arrest by those who need help." The Guardian (2022, June 1)
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/31/canada-decriminalize-drugs-british-columbia-overdoses>.

What needs to be moving forward?

- Substance use disorder is a chronic relapsing condition, so you have it for life and must be managed.
- Most synthetic drugs come from China as referenced by Ben Perrin and also news correspondents actually contacting these so-called manufacturers in China in this [documentary](#).
- Canada also receives about 2 million pieces of mail every month. Law enforcement has admitted that it impossible to check them all. (Hard to stop the source).
- Fentanyl can be made from any lab by purchasing the right ingredients from a pharmacy and even if you stop imports because it's a synthetic drug so you really can't shut it down.
- This documentary "[Cartels Are Making Millions on Fentanyl-Laced Medicine | Crimewave](#)" underscores how easy it is for people to make synthetic drugs.
- Drug users need more support by setting up more needle exchange units and more clinics that can provide substances in a controlled manner.
- Vice News produced a clip "[How Steroids Became More Popular than Heroin | News on drugs](#)" talking about needles and the drug world giving some insights on solutions such as needle exchange units.
- Drug users want us to see them as people and have some care and compassion for them.