



Six Years Since the Declaration of the Overdose Crisis in BC

A Message from Michael Sandler, NNPBC Chief Executive Officer

This year, April 14, 2022 marks six years since the Overdose Crisis was declared a public health emergency in BC. In 2016, BC witnessed increased deaths due to overdose and a toxic drug supply that posed a significant threat to the health of British Columbians. By declaring this crisis to be a public health emergency, the provincial government recognized the need for immediate intervention. At that time, it was noted that without taking further steps to combat overdose and to draw awareness to toxic illicit substances, BC could see between 600 to 800 deaths linked to overdose in 2016. In actuality that number reached [nearly 1000 that year alone](#), and the number of lives lost continues to increase. The January 2022 BC Coroners Service report noted that more than 2200 lives were lost in 2021, making it the [deadliest year since the declaration of the crisis](#). To date, [overdose and illicit drug toxicity are the leading causes of unnatural death in BC](#), and more than 10,000 British Columbians have died as a result of a toxic drug supply in the last ten years.

This problem persists in large part due to stigma surrounding substance use. Stigma, including negative attitudes and discrimination, create barriers to care and quite simply cost lives. The toxic drug supply is a major public health crisis, and nurses and our colleagues in health care must work to reduce and ultimately eliminate the stigma that prevents this crisis from receiving the full attention that it requires.

This is not to say that good work has not yet been done. NNPBC commends the provincial government for its [request for federal exemption to decriminalize personal possession of drugs](#) under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*. NNPBC has long supported the [decriminalization of personal possession of substances](#) and fully endorses the province's move in this direction. However, further action must be readily taken to not lose this momentum. With news of a [potentially reduced threshold limit for personal possession](#), the true realities of this health crisis are not yet being adequately recognized at the policy level. Furthermore, NNPBC was instrumental in advocating for expanded prescriptive authority for BC's Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses to combat this crisis through the prescribing of safer alternatives to street drugs, and will continue to advocate for all forms of harm reduction including safe supply, decriminalization, widescale distribution and use of naloxone kits, supervised consumption sites, overdose prevention sites, and increased funding to go toward community awareness and safety programs. Such approaches to harm reduction are lifesaving, and NNPBC looks forward to continued collaboration and work with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and other partners in health care to bring about meaningful solutions.

Sincerely,

Michael Sandler, RN, MSN, CNCC(C), CGNC

NNPBC Resources:

- [The Overdose and Toxic Drug Crisis in 2021](#)
- [BC Request for Federal Exemption to Decriminalize Personal Possession](#)
- [De-Stigmatizing Language](#)
- [Impact of the Overdose Crisis on Indigenous Peoples in BC](#)
- [Impact of the Overdose Crisis on Chronic Pain Sufferers](#)
- [Bill C-22](#)
- [Understanding the Implications of Dual Public Health Emergencies](#)
- [Safe Supply](#)
- [NNPBC and the Harm Reduction Nurses Association \(HRNA\) call for the decriminalization of people who use drugs in BC](#)