

Responses to Fentanyl

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Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction:

Overdoses Education and Nasal Naloxone Distribution Program (OEND):

- The programs set out to prevent overdose are there to educate people at risk of overdose and bystanders in how to prevent, recognize and responded to an overdose.
 - Do not use alone.
 - Recognize overdoses by assessing unresponsiveness and decreased breathing.
 - Responding to an overdose by seeking help, providing rescue breathing, administering naloxone, and stay with the person till medical personnel arrive.
- In B.C.'s 20 overdose prevention sites, there were 66,604 visits between December 2017 and March 2017. At these sites there were 481 overdoses that were reversed.¹

Medication-Assisted Therapies (MATs):

- MATs are a combination of FDA-approved medications, counselling, and behavioural therapies, which provide a “whole-patient” approach to address substance use disorders.
- There are three medications that are used to treat opioid addictions:
 - Methadone.
 - Naltrexone.
 - Buprenorphine.
- Some of the benefits that are found when MATs are used are:
 - Higher levels of engagement in intervention
 - Increased rate of treatment compliance.
 - Decrease opioid use. Decrease criminal activity.
 - Lower incidence of overdose.
 - Decrease in overdose deaths and an increase in survival rates²

Addiction Treatment:

- Mental health has been proven to have an influence on an individual's addictive behaviour. When a person is mentally unwell, the likelihood of them becoming addicted increases.
- With that said, their needs to be a focus on the mental and physical health of the individual and not just focusing on the addiction.
- Counselling alone has become a major part of treatment when opioids are involved. There are many benefits to using counselling as a response to addiction.
 - Counselling encourages individuals to change their attitudes toward drug use.
 - Increases a healthier lifestyle.
 - Counselling also helps encourage sticking to medication plans.³

Harm Reduction in Prisons:

- Late June 2019, Drumheller Institution will open an overdoses prevention sight.
- This has been seen as a positive measure curbing rising overdose numbers in prisons.
- By doing this it will help eliminate:
 - Sharing needles among inmates.
 - Limit the transmission of infectious diseases.
 - Prompt referrals to health-care services and programs.
 - Prevent fatal and non-fatal overdoses.
- While this is a step, some believe it is a step that could have been taken another direction.
 - For example, putting the funding into addiction counselling and treatment in the institutions.⁴

¹Opioid overdose prevention: Education and naloxone distribution. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.catie.ca/ga-pdf.php?file=sites/default/files/BestPractices_OpioidOverdosePrevention_July2013.pdf Harm Reduction Coalition. (n.d.). Overdose prevention. Retrieved from <https://harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/> Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.). Overdose prevention. Retrieved from <https://cmha.ca/documents/overdose-prevention>

²Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.). Medication-assisted treatment (MATs). Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment> EHN Canada. (n.d.). Medication assisted treatment. Retrieved from <https://edgewoodhealthnetwork.com/locations/inpatient-centres/edgewood/programs/medication-assisted-treatment/>

³National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2019, February). Fentanyl. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/fentanyl>

⁴Browne, R., (2019, June 10). A prison is opening the first overdose prevention site for inmates in Canada. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/5373931/overdose-prevention-site-prison>

Fentanyl in Alberta

Discussion:

- While there are several avenues of response, OEND combined with MATs is the best response for decreasing fentanyl overdose death. Opting for an abstinence only response has not been shown to decrease overdose-related death and is typically not maintained by users outside a clinic.
- Tolerance builds over time; if a user returns to opioids after a break, their likelihood of overdose is much higher and can be deadly. MATs protect against this. OEND returns life if a person does overdose – together reducing opioid dependent mortality.
- It is important to also include standard addiction therapy and treatment in Alberta's response to recover any underlying health concerns which may contribute to an addiction.

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