

## Briefing note on terminology

Use of terms like “drug poisoning crisis” and “drug toxicity deaths,” in lieu of “opioid overdose,” is gaining in popularity.<sup>1,2,3</sup> This is because of the increasingly deadly presence of fentanyl in Canada’s unregulated drug supply. Unregulated opioids are unpredictable and now contain high amounts of fentanyl and other substances, including xylazine and benzodiazepines, contributing to 7,328 drug toxicity deaths in Canada in 2022.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> The majority of these deaths were accidental and involved the presence of multiple substances.<sup>6</sup> Fentanyl has been found in 80-90% of cases.<sup>6,8,9</sup>

Language matters and can significantly influence levels of public support for safe consumption services.<sup>10</sup> “Opioid overdose” can be stigmatizing in that it can imply personal blame or wrongdoing. It may also be the language used by people accessing services and could be considered appropriate usage in this instance. For the most part, using terminology like “drug poisoning” and “drug toxicity” is more medically accurate, less stigmatizing, and can even contribute to better treatment outcomes for people who use substances.<sup>11</sup>

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