



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

POLICY SUPPLEMENT ON HARM REDUCTION 1 OF 3

The Context for the FNHA's Policy on Harm Reduction

A KEY PART OF OUR COMMITMENT TO FIRST NATIONS MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The FNHA's Policy on Harm Reduction, which is guided by the FNHA's 2019 Policy on Mental Health and Wellness, aims to support healthy, self-determining and vibrant First Nations communities, families and children in BC by building upon our cultural and community strengths and resilience as we face substance use challenges that are a legacy of historical and present-day colonialism, racism, discrimination and intergenerational trauma.

TWO PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES HAVE COMPOUNDED THE IMPACTS OF SUBSTANCE USE

In 2016, BC declared a public health emergency in response to the rapidly escalating numbers of illicit drug overdose deaths. This provincial crisis has severely and disproportionately affected First Nations people. Nearly four years later, the province declared the emerging COVID-19 pandemic to be a second public health emergency. Although there had been a downward trend in overdose deaths in 2019, this trend reversed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health response, which interrupted drug supply chains and increased the toxicity of street drugs and led to more people using drugs alone due to physical distancing recommendations. The unprecedented dual public health emergencies compounded risks and harms for people who use substances, and First Nations people are dying from overdose at rates never before seen in BC.

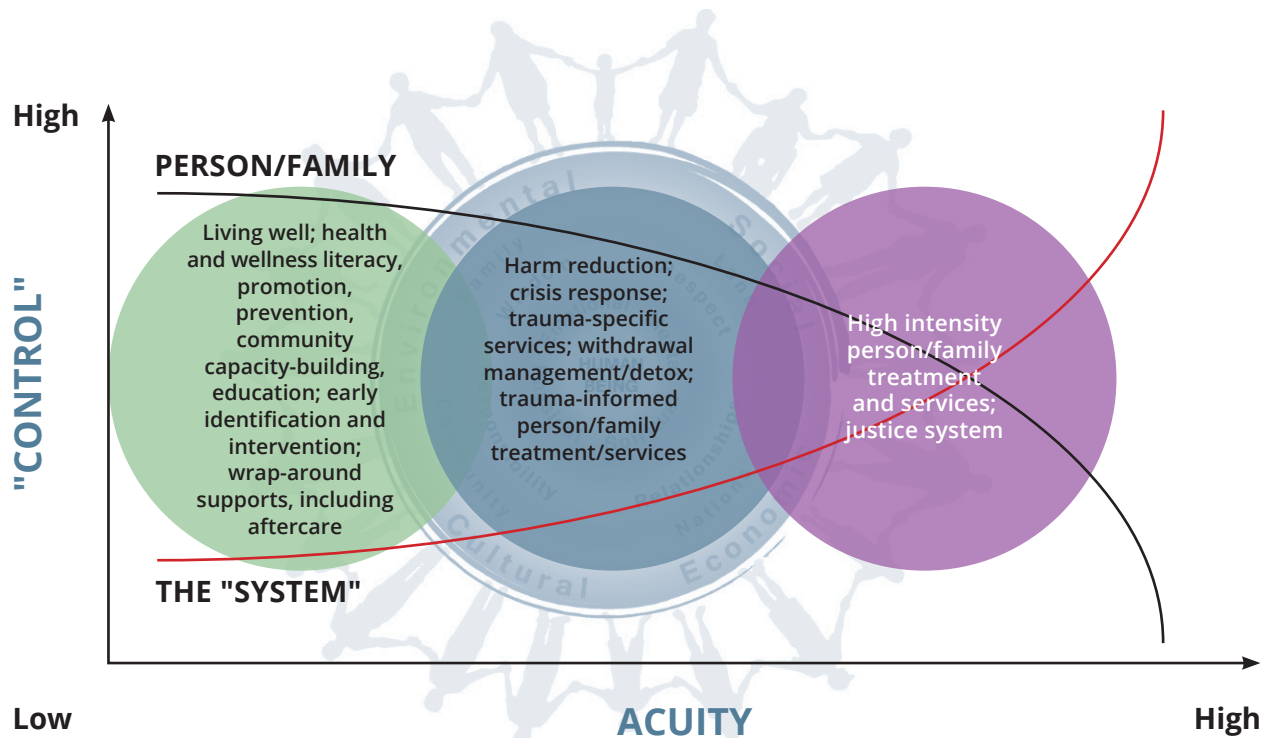
While the FNHA's Policy on Harm Reduction outlines the organization's long-term vision and broad action areas to support First Nations people who use substances, it does so in the context of BC's current public health emergencies and includes action areas at their intersection. The overdose emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic have deepened our understanding of the long-standing and significant gaps in supports for people who use substances in BC. This understanding shapes how the FNHA plans to directly provide harm reduction supports to First Nations people and communities, and how the FNHA will work with health system partners to ensure they expand their harm reduction programs, supplies and services in ways that are culturally safe and trauma-informed.

A CONTINUUM OF CARE

The FNHA's [Policy on Mental Health and Wellness](#) outlines a vision for system-wide transformative approaches to mental health and wellness to support First Nations people across a comprehensive continuum of wholistic and culturally safe programs and services. This continuum is captured in the following graphic, which groups programs and services according to the level of need and/or involvement in the health care system. One end of the continuum represents areas where there is greater individual and family control (the green circle). As you move along the continuum and the individual's needs become more acute or intense, there is less individual control and higher involvement of the health care and criminal justice system (the purple circle).

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS CONTINUUM

(Adapted from Douglas Eby of South Central Foundation)



← **CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL WELLNESS** →
Self-Determination, Connection to Land, Cultural Practices, Language, Elders and Knowledge Keepers

← **HEALTH EQUITY LENSES** →
Stages of Life, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Disability, Race, Poverty

← **CROSS-CUTTING REQUIREMENTS/FACILITATORS** →
Evidence, Policy, Governance, Health, Human Resources, Cultural Safety and Humility, Trauma-Informed Care, Coordinated and Integrated Care, Funding/Resources

The blue circle, which is the home of harm reduction, represents those programs and services that should be available when people are seeking support for specific mental health and substance use concerns. This is often their first point of contact with the health care system.

Harm reduction and other supports included in the blue circle are crucial for providing people with the care they need, as well as for preventing the higher-intensity/acuity interventions represented by the purple circle, where a person's control over their health and wellness is reduced and the health care or criminal justice system assumes greater involvement in health care decisions.