

# FIRST NATIONS AND THE TOXIC DRUG POISONING CRISIS IN BC

JANUARY - JUNE 2023

Harm reduction efforts are saving lives but toxicity in the drug supply is increasing, resulting in record high levels of toxic drug poisoning deaths among First Nations, affecting their families and communities across BC.



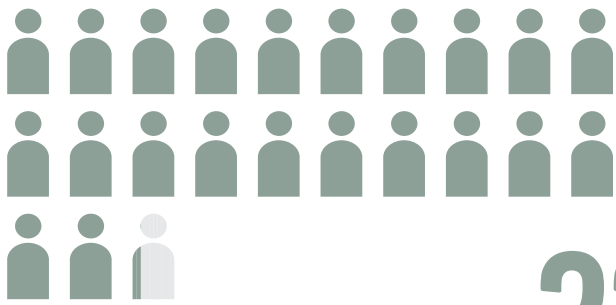
## TOXIC DRUG POISONING DEATHS

### NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO DIED OF TOXIC DRUG POISONING

**24.7%** ↑

Increase in toxic drug poisoning deaths, compared to the same period in 2022.

2023 (JAN-JUN)



**222**

EQUALS 10 DEATHS

2022 (JAN-JUN)



**178**

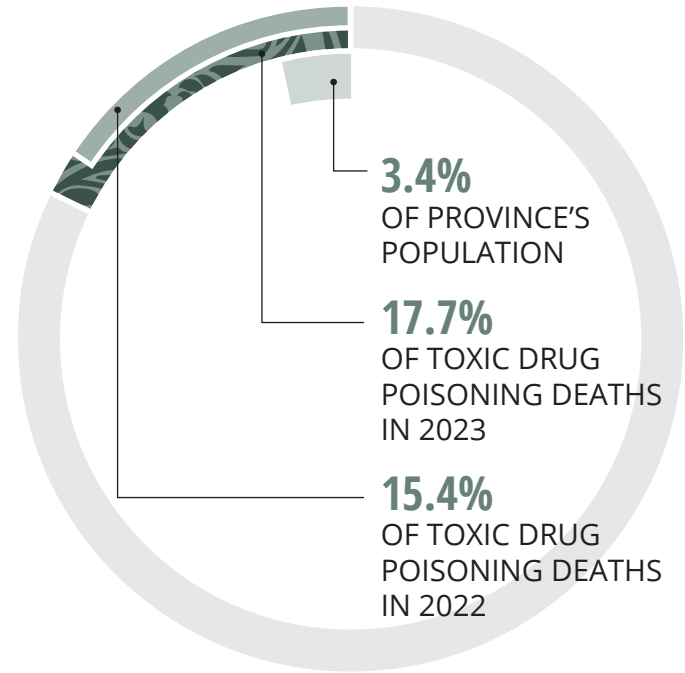
EQUALS 10 DEATHS

### 2023 (Jan-Jun) DEATHS OF FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE BY GENDER



*Indigenous people who are not recognized as having First Nations status under the Indian Act are not represented in our toxic drug data. Additionally, two-spirit, transgender, non-binary, intersex, and gender diverse people may be identified by the biological sex assigned at birth, and therefore misidentified in the toxic drug data. The FNHA is committed to working with provincial partners towards meaningful, systemic change that will make more inclusive data collection possible.*

### FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY REPRESENTED IN TOXIC DRUG POISONING DEATHS



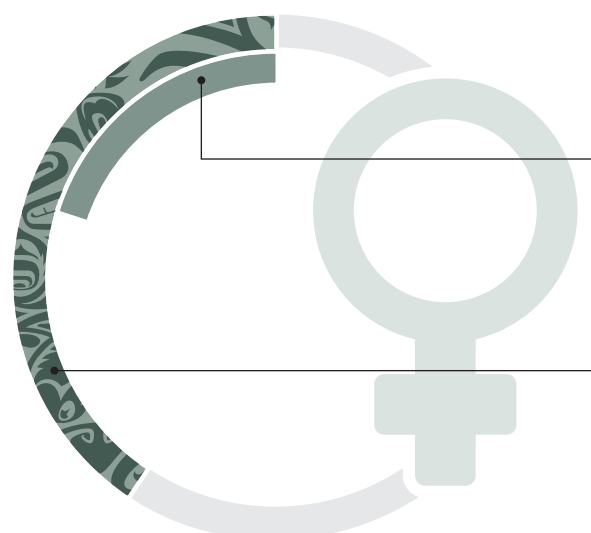
### RATE OF TOXIC DRUG POISONING DEATH

**6.0 x** First Nations people died at 6.0 times the rate of other BC residents in 2023 (Jan-June). This number was 5.3 for the same time period in 2022.

**11.9 x** First Nations women died at 11.9 times the rate of other female BC residents in 2023.

**4.6 x** First Nations men died at 4.6 times the rate of other male BC residents in 2023.

### FIRST NATIONS WOMEN CONTINUE TO EXPERIENCE VERY HIGH RATES OF TOXIC DRUG POISONING DEATH



**19.9%** OF OTHER BC RESIDENTS WHO DIED IN 2023 WERE WOMEN

**40.5%** OF FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE WHO DIED IN 2023 WERE WOMEN

# ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE FNHA TO PREVENT DRUG POISONING DEATHS

JANUARY - JUNE 2023

## PREVENT PEOPLE FROM DYING



- **Distribution of naloxone (nasal spray and injectable):** Between the months of January to June 2023, the FNHA dispensed: 2,487 doses of nasal naloxone spray to individuals through community pharmacies, and:
  - 3,617 nasal naloxone kits (each kit contains two doses) to 62 First Nations communities and organizations through bulk ordering.
  - The FNHA also collaborated with health system partners in their distribution of 5,435 injectable naloxone kits (each kit contains three doses) to 172 First Nations take-home naloxone sites.
- **Harm reduction-related grants:** From Jan. 1 to June 30, 2023, the FNHA provided a total of 106 harm reduction grants of up to \$50,000, and three “Kickstarter” grants, each valued at \$2,500, to harm reduction champions. The Kickstarter fund is a grant to support Not Just Naloxone graduates to host their own virtual or in-person training events in First Nations communities.

## KEEP PEOPLE SAFE WHEN USING



- **Not Just Naloxone training:** 69 people completed training sessions between January and June 2023. In these one- and two-day workshops, participants learn how to use naloxone within a wholistic context that also explores the root causes of addiction, racism and prohibition in Canada, decolonizing substance use, and community and individual resilience. There were five in-person sessions and one virtual session.
- **Regional staff:** Expanded toxic drug response capacity with 10 Harm Reduction Educators, five regional substance use wellness navigators, and 10 Peer Coordinators who are deployed across all five regions in urban hotspots, based on health surveillance data, and five Child and Youth Care Community Coordinators who work to build youth connections and networks in First Nations communities.
- **First Nations Harm Reduction Policy:** The FNHA has worked to implement the five key action areas of the Policy, including provision of First Nations harm reduction services, expansion of substitution therapies, support for a safer supply of substances, and bringing First Nations concerns to BC’s proposed decriminalization of people who use toxic drugs. Two community-led, mobile overdose prevention sites are being developed; one in partnership with the Nuu-Chah-Nulth family, and the other in partnership with Cheam First Nations and Fraser Health.

## CREATE AN ACCESSIBLE RANGE OF TREATMENT OPTIONS



- **Opioid agonist therapy (OAT):** The FNHA supported 27 rural and remote First Nations communities to improve access to opioid use disorder OAT treatment, including supporting 37 nurses to undergo (11 completed) the BCCSU: Provincial Opioid Addiction Treatment Services Program (POATSP) Education Training Pathway. Planning is underway at three other locations towards achieving Chief Medical Officer site approval and enabling community nurse prescribing.
- **First Nations Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service:** Psychiatrists and addictions specialists held 1,083 virtual sessions and care coordinators had 224 meetings with First Nations people and their family members to support access to culturally safe care planning, treatment and healing.
- **Indigenous and land-based healing:** Ongoing collaboration with partners and Indigenous service agencies to support and increase access to Indigenous treatment and land-based healing services that are grounded in cultural teachings.
- **First Nations treatment and healing centres:** Ongoing activities to revitalize six existing treatment centres across the province and construct two new healing centres in the Vancouver Coastal and Fraser Salish regions. This has included the creation of accessible pathways for requests to access FNHA-purchased private treatment centre beds to address unmet needs.
- **OAT clinic fees:** 247 people received subsidies to access OAT at medical clinics.

## SUPPORT PEOPLE ON THEIR HEALING JOURNEYS



- **Courageous Conversations Webinar Series and events:** Hosted a series of webinars between January to June, in which 54 people participated in conversations about substance use and harm reduction. The team has prepared and launched the *Courageous Conversations on Substance Use Tool Kit* and the *Healing Indigenous Hearts Facilitator Guidebook* as community resources.
- **Unlocking the Gates:** Supported 371 people during their release from incarceration to address the link between transitioning out of correctional facilities and subsequent toxic drug poisoning events and deaths.
- **Promoting culturally safe services:** Nurtured partnerships with Indigenous service providers and health system partners to address cultural safety and systemic anti-Indigenous racism in health services provided to Indigenous people.



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

[WWW.FNHA.CA/HARMREDUCTION](http://WWW.FNHA.CA/HARMREDUCTION)