First Nations and Opioid Overdose

A severe and persistent threat to wellness

Presented by Dr. Shannon McDonald, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, FNHA
Introduction

April marked the 3rd anniversary of this public health emergency.

First Nations continue to be disproportionately impacted by the overdose crisis.

The gap between First Nations and non-First Nation is wide and it’s getting wider.
Introduction

We’ve been listening. We have visited 180 communities and spoken with thousands of citizens and frontline workers.

The message is clear - we must do everything in our power to keep people alive.

It’s time to tackle the root causes, including the poisoned drug supply.
FNHA’s Framework For Action: A System Approach

SYSTEM WIDE OPIOID PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE FOR FIRST NATIONS IN BC

4 ACTION AREAS

• Prevent people who overdose from dying
• Keep people safe when using substances
• Create an accessible range of treatment options
• Support people on their healing journeys
What do we know?

3.4% of BC’s population is comprised of First Nations peoples.

16.2% of all overdose events in BC involved First Nations peoples.

In 2017, First Nations experience overdose events 6X more than other residents.
What do we know?

12.8% of all overdose deaths in BC involved First Nations peoples.

First Nations experience overdose deaths 4.2X more than other residents.

In 2018, BC Coroners Services recorded 193 First Nations men and women died of an overdose in BC, a 20 percent increase from 2017.
THE OPIOID EMERGENCY HAS EQUALLY AFFECTED FIRST NATIONS MEN AND WOMEN

In 2017 across BC, First Nations population overdose events have affected:  

54% men and 46% women

Other BC resident overdose events affected: 73% men | 27% women
Where is this happening?

Heightened number of events and deaths in cities.

First Nations areas of concern are similar but not the same as other residents.
Overdose Events: Age

Average age of First Nations people who experience an overdose event in BC is 36 years.

Average age of Other Residents who experience an overdose event in BC is 40 years.
Nonfatal Overdose Event Rates by Year

Event rates have increased over time for both status First Nations and other residents

First Nations nonfatal overdose rates were:

- **6x** higher than Other Residents in **2017**
- **5x** higher than Other Residents in **2016**
- **4.5x** higher than Other residents in **2015**
Fatal Overdose Event Rates by Year

BC First Nations fatal overdose rates were:

- **4.2x** higher than other BC residents in **2018**
- **3.5x** higher than other BC residents in **2017**
- **3x** higher than other BC residents in **2016**
- **3x** higher than other BC residents in **2015**
2018 Fatal Overdose Rates by Region

Regional First Nations fatal overdose rates were:

- **7.8x** higher than other BC residents in **Vancouver Coastal**
- **6.8x** higher than other BC residents in **Fraser Salish**
- **3.9x** higher than other BC residents in **Vancouver Island**
- **2.5x** higher than other BC residents in the **Interior**
- **2.0x** higher than other BC residents in **Northern**
Nonfatal Overdose Events among First Nations
Vancouver Coastal - 2017

First Nations represented 21.1% of all overdose events in the Vancouver Coastal Region.

First Nations in Vancouver Coastal experience non-fatal overdoses at a rate 12.5x that of other residents.
Fatal Overdose Events among First Nations Vancouver Coastal - 2018

First Nations represented 14.0% of all overdose deaths in Vancouver Coastal Region.

First Nations in the Vancouver Coastal Region experience fatal overdoses at a rate 7.8x that of other residents.
Vancouver Coastal Region
First Nations Overdose Events (2015-17)

- Vancouver – City Centre 213
- Vancouver – DTES 1499
- Vancouver – Midtown 85
Why is the Gap Widening?

• First Nations peoples report less access to mental health and addiction treatment that is culturally safe and appropriate

• Systemic Racism toward First Nations is a barrier to health care

• Unresolved Intergenerational trauma is associated with a higher risk of substance use

• First Nations in BC are less advantaged than many other populations in terms of social determinants of health like poverty and lack of housing, which are predictors of substance use disorder and addiction as well.
Deaths Averted

**Estimated Probability of Death from an Overdose with No Intervention (Green) Versus the Average Probability Including the Impact of THN and OPS (Blue). Dashed Line Represents When the Provincial Public Health Emergency Was Declared.**
What more is needed?

- Focus on cities, notably the downtown eastside
- Additional supports and services for First Nations women
- Services that are more culturally safe and trauma informed
- First Nations accounted for 13 percent of overdose deaths in 2018, we need to be at least 13 percent of the response
Vancouver Coastal Region

FNHA VCR Mental Health & Wellness Approach to Harm Reduction

Cassandra Puckett
June 2019
Regional Approach to Harm Reduction

• Partnership is KEY!!

• Flexible Funding through Mental Wellness Substance Use Virtual Team

• South Coast Sub-Regional Peer Support Program

• Regional participation in Urban service environment

• Shaping Harm Reduction to support our rural/remote Communities
Vancouver Coastal Region

Responding to Opioid Crisis in Community

“The creation of space for healing regardless of where one is in their journey”

Vancouver Coastal Regional Caucus June 2019
Vancouver Coastal Region

Community Response Process

- Crisis Response Protocol
- Nation led interventions and education
- FNHA Training Opportunities
- Support in Harm Reduction Education Materials
- Access to Naloxone/Nasal Naloxone
- Improving access to OAT in rural and remote Communities
- Partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health
- Ongoing Support

“We must not forget the importance of being grounded in the past and who we are.”

Southern Stl’atl’imx

“Healing has to happen in the heart and we have to include culture”

Central Coast

“Wealing comes through spirituality, taking responsibility for mental and physical wellness; it comes through Nt’akmen (our way of life) and Nxequmen (our laws). This is a wonderful opportunity to develop a strategy for us, by us”

South Coast