

August 2024

Each year on August 31 we recognize [International Overdose Awareness Day](#). This day marks an opportunity for reflection of those lost due to the toxic drug crisis. In British Columbia alone, more than 21,000 people have lost their lives since the declaration of a public health emergency in 2016. These are people who died in the prime of their lives because of toxic drugs. They were valued by their friends, families and other loved ones and we acknowledge their loss and offer our condolences to those who mourn them. The theme for this year's International Overdose Awareness Day is "Together We Can" which highlights the ways in which we can all work together to end overdose.

In British Columbia overdose death rates continue to remain at an alarming rate of about six people a day. Between January and June 30, 2024, 1158 people died. The vast majority were men between the ages of 30 and 59. The rate of female deaths is also increasing to 22 in 100,000 for the first half of 2024 which is up from 13 in 100,000 in 2020. All areas of the province are impacted by these deaths and many of us may know someone or of someone who has been impacted by overdose.

Despite eight years of a public health crisis, there are too many barriers to support people who need help. As a province, we continue to see this loss of life as people struggle to access care for substance use disorders and endure the perpetuation of shame and stigma that keeps many others from seeking care at all.

BC's roughly 800 Naturopathic Doctors provide a viable option and access point for those who need care. Given the depth of this crisis, this widening of the circle of access would uncover many new care pathways to those struggling with opioid use disorder. We know that NDs treat patients holistically using an approach that focuses on intersectionality -- a lens that considers health from a variety of factors like race, class, income, education, age, ability, sexual orientation, immigration status, ethnicity, indigeneity, and geography. The reasons for substance use disorder are complex and driven from a variety of factors, and NDs provide a fulsome approach to care that is built on an open, trusted relationship.

By focusing on holistic and non-judgemental care, NDs can offer a broad range of supports to those who use substances, or who are seeking treatment and recovery options. While this includes prescribing OAT, it also includes alternative treatments for chronic pain, often a root cause of addiction for many, as well as support and care in mental health including but not limited to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. This non-judgemental supportive lifestyle management can help those who use substances by managing the stressors and underlying factors that may lead to substance use. It is important to note that fear of judgement often keeps people from seeking treatment and removing barriers means accepting that not all patients are finding or comfortable seeking medical attention in conventional settings. Unfortunately, poor experiences have led some to feeling dismissed in traditional settings. This leaves many people who are far less likely to interact with the services they need when they need them. In the worst-case scenario, this may mean they die.

British Columbia's naturopathic doctors look forward to opportunities where we can utilize our skills, knowledge and expertise in working with our colleagues to ensure that anyone who seeks care in this province is able to do so with a provider of their choice