

August 31, 2026

Each year on August 31, we mark International Overdose Awareness Day, a time to remember those whose lives have been lost to the toxic drug crisis, honour those who continue to live with substance use disorders, and stand with the families, friends, and communities forever changed by overdose.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of International Overdose Awareness Day. The 2026 theme, "25 Years On. Still Needed.", is a sobering reminder that while awareness has grown over the past quarter century, the need for compassion, evidence-informed care, and meaningful action has not diminished. Overdose deaths remain preventable, yet too many people continue to lose their lives to an increasingly toxic and unpredictable drug supply.

In British Columbia, the toxic drug crisis continues to have a profound impact on individuals, families, and communities across the province. Behind every statistic is a person with hopes, relationships, and a life that mattered. Today, we honour their memory, acknowledge the grief carried by those left behind, and recognize the dedication of the healthcare providers, first responders, outreach workers, peers, and community organizations working every day to save lives.

Twenty-five years of awareness have taught us an important lesson: there is no single solution to this crisis. Lasting progress requires a coordinated, evidence-informed approach that includes prevention, harm reduction, accessible treatment, recovery supports, stable housing, mental health services, and long-term primary care. It also requires us to confront the stigma that continues to prevent many people from seeking help when they need it most.

Naturopathic doctors have an important role to play within this broader continuum of care. As regulated, highly qualified primary care providers, NDs develop long-term therapeutic relationships with patients and provide whole-person, evidence-informed care that recognizes the complex biological, psychological, and social factors that contribute to health. Their focus on continuity of care allows them to support patients through chronic pain, mental health concerns, trauma, and other conditions that may intersect with substance use.

For individuals living with substance use disorders, or those working toward recovery, trusted relationships with healthcare providers can make a meaningful difference. Naturopathic doctors strive to provide care that is compassionate, non-judgemental, and patient-centred, helping individuals navigate their health with dignity while working collaboratively alongside other healthcare professionals to support their goals.

International Overdose Awareness Day also reminds us that reducing overdose deaths is not solely the responsibility of any one profession or sector. It requires healthcare providers, governments, community organizations, researchers, families, and people with lived and living experience to work together toward solutions grounded in evidence, compassion, and respect.

On this day, we remember those we have lost. We support those who continue to grieve. And we reaffirm our commitment to a healthcare system where everyone can access timely, respectful, evidence-informed care without fear of stigma or discrimination.

On behalf of the BCND Board of Directors