

Statement on International Overdose Awareness Day 2023

For immediate release

August 31, 2023 – [International Overdose Awareness Day](#). An international day of collective mourning, remembrance, and action.

Today, and every day, we mourn thousands. They are our parents, partners, siblings, friends, family, and colleagues. Their deaths were preventable.

Between 2016 and 2022, [36,442 people](#) died from consuming lethal, unregulated drugs across Canada. In 2022 alone, 7,328 people died – a staggering rate of approximately [20 people dying each day](#).

We can prevent losing the lives of our friends, families, and loved ones by changing drug policies that criminalize, stigmatize, and marginalize people who use drugs. We can prevent many harms, including death, by ensuring that people have access to a safer supply of regulated drugs of known quality and potency.

People need a safer alternative to the potent, [unregulated toxic street supply](#). [Prescribed safer supply](#) reduces overdose risk and improves the health and wellness of people who use drugs.

This medicalized model of safer supply alone does not adequately or appropriately address the escalating drug toxicity crisis and the potency of increasingly harmful unregulated drugs. There are only a handful of safer supply programs across the country, serving a small number of people due to capacity and funding limitations. These programs do not meet the needs of people who use drugs recreationally and only reach a tiny fraction of those in need. Though programs try, and some manage with success on a small scale, they lack resources to adequately address critical social determinants of health such as housing, food security, and social protection.

The over 1,450 members of the [National Safer Supply Community of Practice](#) (NSS-CoP) work together to exchange knowledge and build capacity for safer supply prescribing, program delivery, and support for all who provide care and services from a harm reduction perspective. All our members – physicians and physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, people who use(d) drugs, harm reduction workers, researchers, program managers, policy analysts, and activists – know that a vast and robust continuum of care options is needed to address the diverse and unique needs of people who use drugs.

This continuum includes a range of harm reduction services, prescribed safer supply programs, non-medical [community-led safer supply](#) initiatives, traditional addiction medicine treatments, and other interventions identified and/or led by people who use drugs.

Without radical, profound, and swift policy changes that include [decriminalization](#) and [regulation](#), people who use drugs will continue to die at increasingly alarming rates.

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Without a large and sustainable investment in an expanded continuum of care options and meaningful actions towards providing safe and affordable housing, the quality of life and safety of people who use drugs cannot significantly improve and will deteriorate as the drug supply becomes increasingly dangerous.

Today – and every day – we stand with all who mourn and grieve the immense losses of our loved ones. We stand in solidarity with those who have been tirelessly and relentlessly organizing for decades for life-saving services like safer supply initiatives, sanctioned and unsanctioned safe consumption and overdose prevention sites, harm reduction programs, social housing projects, and the other creative community-based solutions led by people who use drugs.

We honour you all for your tireless, under-appreciated work and for bearing your authentic hearts, minds, and souls despite such unparalleled heart-shattering grief and trauma. We remain deeply committed to building solidarity and strategy with communities to collaboratively press for transformative life-saving and life-changing programs and policies.

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