

### Strategies and Initiatives being implemented in other Jurisdictions

The global response to preventing drug poisoning injuries and deaths involves a range of strategies and initiatives. It is important to note the response to drug poisoning is a complex and evolving issue that varies from country to country. Responses are influenced by cultural, legal and socioeconomic factors, among others. This document provides an overview of initiatives undertaken by various jurisdictions. As many initiatives are new and/or ongoing, there may be limited publicly available information detailing the results and outcomes of these initiatives.

#### Canadian Context

##### Alberta

##### Calgary

#### Safeworks Harm Reduction Program

- Established in 2017 and provides 24/7 access to Safe Consumption Sites.
- Services include safer substance use and overdose prevention and response education.
- Evidence-based services to support prevention, harm reduction and treatment.

#### Calgary Public Safety and Community Response Task Force

- Established in December 2022 by the provincial government and implements addiction and housing support services.
- Allocated as part of the government's \$187 million commitment to address addiction and homelessness in Alberta's urban centres.

*\*This is similar to the task force in Edmonton*

**Drug Checking:** Alberta Alliance who Educates and Advocates Responsibly received funding (\$672, 288) from Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program to begin a drug checking pilot project.

**Municipal Response:** In March 2021, the City Council of Calgary approved the Mental Health and Addiction Strategy along with the Investment Framework designed to direct funds towards three crucial goals which includes being well, getting help and staying safe.<sup>1</sup> The allocation of funds is managed by Administration in collaboration with the Community Investment Table, established in 2020 to jointly invest in and guide fast pilot projects

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.calgary.ca/social-services/funding/mental-health.html>

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addressing mental health, addiction and public safety issues. Additionally, investments related to safety fall under the Community Safety Investment Framework.<sup>2</sup>

**Stats:** From September to November 2022, there were 114 drug poisoning deaths, which is a decrease compared to 149 opioid-related fatalities in the same period in 2021, while there were 108 in 2020.

#### *Edmonton*

##### **Supervised Consumption Sites**

- Three locations in Edmonton: ARCH Program at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, George Spady Society and Radius.
- People have access to use pre-obtained drugs in a safer and more hygienic space.

##### **Edmonton Public Safety and Community Response Task Force**

- Established in 2022 to highlight addiction, homelessness and public safety initiatives.
- Allocated as part of the government's \$187 million commitment to address addiction and homelessness in Alberta's urban centres.

**Drug Checking:** Available through Queer and Trans Health Collective and the 4B Harm Reduction Society.

**Municipal Response:** The City of Edmonton and Alberta Health Services jointly lead the Community Liaison Committee composed of members from various sectors, including the community business, health, individuals with lived experience and experts. Their primary mission is to pinpoint chances for working together on community-driven strategies aimed at decreasing the negative impacts linked to substance use within Edmonton.

*\*Please refer to Attachment 1- Examples of City Activities Reducing and Preventing Drug Poisoning Injuries and Deaths.*

**Stats:** From September to November 2022, there were 149 drug poisoning deaths, with 148 of them being linked to opioids. This marks a decrease from the 188 opioid-related deaths in the same period in 2021, while there were 116 recorded in 2020.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.calgary.ca/social-services/funding/community-safety-investment-framework.html>

### British Columbia

#### Vancouver

- Vancouver's harm reduction efforts encompass supervised injection sites (SIS), needle exchanges and accessible community health services. Vancouver introduced North America's inaugural Supervised Injection Site (SIS), InSite, in September 2003.<sup>3</sup>
- Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS) are authorized by federal exemptions granted under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. In the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) region, SCS facilities are operated by Insite, the Dr. Peter Centre and Hope to Health.<sup>4</sup>
- Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) are authorized to operate legally under a Provincial Ministerial Order addressing the public health overdose crisis. Within the VCH region, there are 12 OPS, each catering to distinct communities.<sup>5</sup>

#### Four Pillar Drug Strategy<sup>6</sup>

- Harm reduction
- Prevention
- Treatment
- Enforcement

**Drug checking:** Available via Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) and Safe Consumption Sites.

**Municipal Response:** In 2005, Vancouver City Council endorsed the preventative drug policy plan titled "Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use". It is the first of its kind in Canada. The plan comprises 27 recommendations and advocates for changes in legislation and regulations to establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for all currently illegal drugs. The City of Vancouver offers 24/7 needle access through peer-based exchanges, mobile units, and healthcare-connected exchanges.

**Stats:** In May 2023, Vancouver Coastal Health, the health authority with the highest recorded deaths and highest fatality rate for the year, reported 51 deaths. This marked a decrease of 17 deaths compared to April 2023 and represented the lowest number since November 2022 when 43 toxic drug-related deaths were reported.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/four-pillars-drug-strategy.aspx>

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<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/decriminalizing-simple-possession-of-illicit-drugs-in-vancouver.aspx>

<sup>5</sup>

<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/decriminalizing-simple-possession-of-illicit-drugs-in-vancouver.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/four-pillars-drug-strategy.aspx>

### Ontario

#### Hamilton

- The Hamilton Drug Strategy is built on an evidence-based approach with four key pillars: Prevention, Harm Reduction, Social Justice, and Treatment, all geared towards addressing the harms of substance use.<sup>7</sup>
- In 2023, as part of its strategy, the Hamilton Drug Strategy began updating the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan to address ongoing opioid-related issues. An update on the action plan, including performance indicators and progress, will be presented to the Public Health Committee in Q1 2024.
- Hamilton Public Health Services, in partnership with Hamilton Paramedic Services, Hamilton Health Services, St. Joseph's Health
- care Hamilton and community organizations, is delivering up-to-date information on opioids to the public.<sup>8</sup>

**Drug Checking:** In March 2019, the Board of health discussed the use of fentanyl test strips and asked staff to investigate providing them to drug users in Hamilton for safer consumption, with a future report to the Board. In Ontario, the Province supports drug checking with test strips exclusively at Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) sites. Hamilton has one Overdose Prevention Site (OPS) transitioning to a CTS site at the Hamilton Urban Care Community Health Centre, which did not provide on-site drug checking services while operating as an OPS and there are no plans to introduce drug testing strips at this location.

**Municipal response:** In February 2023, Hamilton City Council directed staff to work with community members to develop an evidence-based harm reduction plan.<sup>9</sup> This aligns with the priorities outlined in the HDS in February 2023, which stressed on the importance of updating the opioid-specific action plan as part of the HDS renewal. Council instructed the Mayor to issue an emergency declaration concerning opioid-related issues, mental health challenges and homelessness in Hamilton.

**Stats:** In 2018 there were 124 opioid-related deaths, however, from January to April 2023 were 62 suspected opioid-related deaths.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/2022-08/hamilton-drug-strategy-report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-council/plans-strategies/strategies/hamilton-drug-strategy>

<sup>9</sup> <https://pub-hamilton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=366685>

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### Toronto

Decriminalization is consistent with the City of Toronto's goals outlined in SafeTO, its Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.<sup>10</sup> This approach also aligns with the equity-focused priorities of Toronto City Council and the Toronto Board of Health.

- In December 2021, the Toronto Board of Health instructed the Medical Officer of Health to make a formal request by the end of 2021 under Section 56(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize the personal possession of illicit substances within Toronto's city limits.<sup>11</sup> To date, this exemption request has not been responded to by Health Canada.
- The Integrated Prevention and Harm Reduction Initiative (iPHARE) represents a collaborative effort between the City of Toronto and community organizations to combat the rising opioid-related deaths within the city's shelter system, a response to the increasing drug poisoning crisis. iPHARE comprises three primary funding components:
  1. Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre provides harm reduction services to hotels in the shelter system and other Toronto shelter programs.
  2. LOFT Community Services and Toronto North Support Services offer intensified mental health case management support.
  3. Urgent Public Health Needs Sites, situated in selected shelters citywide, supervise drug use to reduce overdose risk.
- Since its initiation in 2020, the safe supply program at Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre has assisted 138 unique clients, with a retention rate of over 76 percent among clients who have stayed enrolled in the program for one year or more. The iPHARE program integrated harm reduction staff into 23 priority locations, including six shelters, four respites and 13 shelter hotels.

**Drug Checking:** Launched in October 2019. One of the few pilot projects that received funding from Health Canada and operates through the exemptions from the Government of Canada's Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Drug samples are collected at five community health centres, and the results are provided to individuals within one to two days along with harm reduction guidance. Since its inception in October 2019, Toronto's

<sup>10</sup><https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/public-safety-alerts/community-safety-programs/community-safety-well-being-plan/>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/94de-Torontos-Model-of-Decriminalizing-Drugs-for-Personal-use-March-22-2023-FINAL.pdf>

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Drug Checking Service has been utilized more than 6,000 times, playing a pivotal role in the City of Toronto's harm reduction efforts.

**Municipal Response:** Toronto Public Health (TPH) is accountable to the Board of Health and is responsible for enhancing the overall population health of the City of Toronto's residents. It is important to note, the Board of Health is under the Municipal government. Alongside proposing the decriminalization of personal possession of controlled substances, TPH urges federal and provincial authorities to allocate more funding towards mental health and substance use services.

**Stats:** In 2021, Toronto witnessed 511 confirmed and 54 probable cases of opioid toxicity deaths. These numbers are consistent with the trends seen in 2020 but indicate a 71 per cent increase compared to 2019 and a 273 per cent increase from 2015.

#### *Ottawa*

The Ottawa Community Action Plan (OCAP)

- Ottawa Public Health (OPH) provides backbone support to ensure ongoing collaboration with the Ottawa Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force, advisory groups, stakeholder groups and partners.

**Drug Checking:** Fentanyl testing strips available through the Aids Committee of Ottawa.

**Municipal Response:** OPH reports to the Board of Health which is a local board of the City under the City of Ottawa Act, 1999.<sup>12</sup> In September, 2021, the Ottawa Board of Health approved OPH's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, which focuses on improving mental health and substance use services. During the session, the Ottawa Board of Health received presentations from OPH's managers and heard support from eight public delegations. The Ottawa Board subsequently voted to endorse the report's recommendations.

**Stats:** Ottawa Public Health reported 25 overdose deaths between September and December 2022. During the summer months that same year (May to August), there were 48 overdose-related deaths.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/ocap.aspx>

## California

### San Francisco

#### Citywide overdose education and distribution of harm reduction supplies

- The Department of Public Health Clearinghouse and the Drug Overdose Prevention and Education (DOPE) Project of the Harm Reduction Coalition distributes naloxone throughout various sites in San Francisco. This is a partnership with the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH).<sup>13</sup>

#### The Street Overdose Response Team (SORT)

- Street-based response for people experiencing homelessness with a recent non-fatal overdose. A multi-disciplinary team provides naloxone, medication assisted therapy, supportive counselling and guidance getting substance use treatment, housing or shelter.
- Collaboration between SFDPH and San Francisco Fire Department which launched in August 2021 and was funded by SFDPH.<sup>14</sup>

#### San Francisco- SoMa RISE (Recover, Initiate, Support, Engage)

- San Francisco's first Drug Sobering Center opened in June 2022 and is funded by SFDPH.<sup>15</sup> A pilot project of San Francisco Public Health and HealthRIGHT 360 was recommended by the Methamphetamine Task Force in 2019.
- A safe indoor space for people who are intoxicated with opioids, methamphetamines, or other substances. It provides an opportunity for people to rest, stabilize, get connected to the right care and access to services (wrap-around services).
- Health and safety workers are trained in Naloxone administration.

**Drug Checking:** Fentanyl test strips are available at harm reduction sites, behavioural health settings as well as community and outreach settings.

**Municipal Response:** The City of San Francisco created the San Francisco Health Authority. San Francisco's Department of Public Health (SFDPH) is addressing the overdose crisis by taking a city-wide approach, involving all city departments that interact with drug users. In 2021, a new law required the Department of Public Health, along with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, the Human Service Agency and the Department of

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<sup>13</sup> [https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/SFDPH%20Overdose%20Plan%202022%20EN\\_0.pdf](https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/SFDPH%20Overdose%20Plan%202022%20EN_0.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/SFDPH%20Overdose%20Plan%202022%20EN\\_0.pdf](https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/SFDPH%20Overdose%20Plan%202022%20EN_0.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://sf.gov/soma-rise-center>

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Emergency Management, to develop overdose prevention policies and train staff regularly interacting with drug users in overdose recognition and response.<sup>16</sup> These agencies are working together to track policy implementation and progress toward common goals.

In response to the Fentanyl crisis, local law enforcement agencies are strategically collaborating to curb open-air drug dealing within the City of San Francisco. The partnership between the Police and the District Attorney's office aims to enforce measures against these illicit activities. The Governor authorized the assistance of the California National Guard (CalGuard) in tackling urgent crime-fighting endeavours centred on drug trafficking operations. Nonprofits were unsuccessful in advancing new supervised consumption sites without full financial support from the city.

SFDPH funds naloxone distribution in San Francisco via the Department of Public Health Clearinghouse and the Drug Overdose Prevention and Education (DOPE) Project of the Harm Reduction Coalition. Operations were scheduled for Monday, May 1, 2023 to disband the supply chain that propels the fentanyl crisis.<sup>17</sup> SFDPH is improving service accessibility and coordination via Mental Health SF, an initiative that builds on the city's network of 400+ mental health and substance use services. Mental Health SF was created by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and is funded through the Our City, Our Home initiative.

The San Francisco Health Commission is mandated by City and County Charter to manage and control the City and County hospitals, to monitor and regulate emergency medical services.

**Stats:** According to the city's medical examiner, 200 people died of overdoses from January to March 2023 compared to the 142 overdose-related deaths in the same months a year ago.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2023/04/28/sf-fentanyl-operation/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2023/04/28/sf-fentanyl-operation/>



### Portugal

#### *Lisbon*

- Lisbon’s harm reduction initiatives are carried out through mobile units, outreach teams, community health centres, drop-in centres and shelters. Additionally, the city opened its first mobile drug consumption room in 2019.<sup>18</sup>
- Founded in 2001, Crescer (“to grow”) is a harm reduction and homelessness non-governmental organization (NGO). Through their programs, Crescer distributed over one million clean syringes and approximately eight thousand consumers of psychoactive substances have been contacted.<sup>19</sup>
- Crescer has their own funding through assistance from local and national bodies as well as the European Union.

#### **Portuguese Drug Policy Model (PDPM)**

- In 2001, Portugal decriminalized the possession and use of all drugs for personal consumption. Individuals found in possession of small quantities of drugs are not subject to criminal prosecution but are referred to a “dissuasion commission” that assesses their situation and may recommend treatment or other interventions.
- In 2021, Portugal inaugurated its first supervised smoking and injection facilities.<sup>20</sup>
- Portugal’s approach is centred on public health, emphasizing treatment, harm reduction and support rather than criminalization. There are two supervised injection sites in Lisbon and one in Porto.
- Limitation: Harm reduction is limited (drug checking services and supervised consumption sites) or nonexistent (outpatient naloxone prescription).<sup>21</sup>
- Drug use was placed under the jurisdiction of the Commissions for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction, created by the Decree-Law n. 130 -A/2001 (January 23, 2001). Law 30/2000, adopted in November 2000 but in place since July 2001, decriminalized consumption, acquisition and possession of drugs for personal consumption. This law is unique as it directs the person using drugs to a panel under the purview of the Ministry of Health instead of the Ministry of Justice.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-022-00607-7>

<sup>19</sup> <https://websummit.com/blog/meet-crescer-our-community-parnter>

<sup>20</sup> <https://harmreductionjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12954-022-00607-7>

<sup>21</sup> <https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-021-00394-7>

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**Drug Checking:** Offered via the harm reduction hub at major festivals (e.g. Boom Festival).

**Municipal Response:** The Lisbon City Council, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and various other stakeholders, actively facilitates improved access to the healthcare services for the residents of Lisbon. The municipal government is committed to fostering a holistic approach within the city, harmonizing efforts across risk reduction, damage minimization, prevention, treatment and social reintegration domains.<sup>22</sup>

Healthcare for individuals with substance use issues in Portugal is managed by the Referral Network for Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies.<sup>23</sup> This network comprises public specialized services that offer treatment for illicit substance dependence, overseen by regional health administrations under the Ministry of Health. Public services are provided free of charge.

**Stats:** In the five years following the reforms, drug-related death rates were similar to the European Union (EU) average. While Portugal's rates decreased after the reform, they increased in the rest of Europe during the same period. Portugal's drug death rates are among the lowest in the EU, with six deaths per million among individuals aged 15-64 in 2019, compared to the EU average of 23.7 per million.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://cidadania.lisboa.pt/programas-e-servicos/alimentacao-e-saude#c23002>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.drugpolicyfacts.org/region/portugal>