



# **It takes strength to ask for help. Ease the Burden**

**Men in trades, substance use  
& the overdose crisis**



Government  
of Canada

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# The overdose crisis in Canada

**44,592**

Since 2016, there have been over **44,592** opioid-related deaths

**22**

On average, **22** people died per day

**17**

**17** are hospitalized per day in Canada

**82%**

In 2023, (January to December), **82%** of opioid-related deaths involved fentanyl, a very strong opioid that is found in other illegal drugs

# The chain of events



1. Over-reliance on opioid prescriptions



2. Increase in diverted or illegally produced opioids



3. Unprecedented rise in synthetic opioids (e.g., Fentanyl)



4. Fentanyl dominates illegal market & is mixed with other drugs causing toxic illegal drug supply

1. Historical prescribing practices led to high level of exposure to opioids medication, the opioid overdose crisis by the high opioid prescribing, causing some to become dependant
2. Then opioids were being illegally made and sold
3. Because of demand, Strong synthetic opioids (like illegally produced fentanyl) started infiltrating the illegal market
4. Now, most opioid overdose deaths are caused because strong y people looking for strong opioids like fentanyl being mixed with other drugs or by taking other illegal drugs that contain fentanyl (sometimes without knowing)

# Men in trades are disproportionately impacted

- ▶ Since 2016 around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of opioid-related deaths were men
- ▶ Men in trades are overly represented:
  - of people who were employed at the time of death, **30–50% were employed in trades**





# Work hard, play hard

Many trades workplaces have a “work hard, play hard” culture, especially outside of work

Men are more likely to use substances to cope with stress or mental health issues

Men are less likely to reach out for help because there is a pressure to be “strong”



# Hard, physical labour takes a toll

- ▶ Hard, physical labour takes a toll on the body
- ▶ It increases the risk of injury and can result in pain
- ▶ When taken properly, pain medication, like prescription opioids, can help people manage pain
- ▶ But some take higher doses of opioids or seek illegal opioids to keep working despite pain which creates a **higher risk for addiction & harms**



# What can you do to help?

- ▶ We need to talk about the impact addiction and substance use is having on our friends and coworkers
- ▶ Reducing the stigma of seeking help and sharing resources can help save lives
- ▶ Learning more about how to use prescription opioids safely, combining pain treatments, and ways to help others who may be struggling with addiction will also save lives



Addiction is a treatable medical condition.

**Not a choice.**





People use substances for many reasons  
but no one chooses to become addicted.





This misconception is preventing people from asking for help.

# Addiction changes the brain's “reward” system

## When someone is affected by an addiction:

- ▶ They experience powerful cravings for the drug (or alcohol) that are extremely hard to ignore
- ▶ They continue using even though it may cause harm to themselves or others
- ▶ The need to obtain the drug/alcohol often overtakes their normal social behaviours and their ability to get help
- ▶ They may be unable to stop, even if they want to

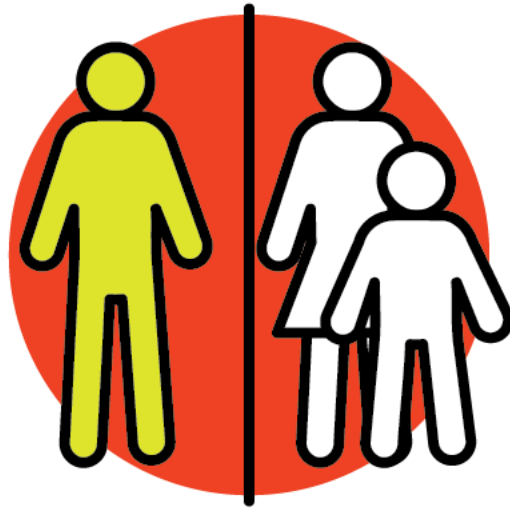




# Recovery is possible

- ▶ Counselling
- ▶ Peer support
- ▶ Abstinence
- ▶ Medical treatment (e.g. opioid agonist therapy)

# Stigma surrounding addiction can



Create  
barriers



Prevent people  
from asking  
for help



Lead people  
to use  
drugs alone



# How can you help?

## Help reduce stigma

- ▶ Be a buddy and support your crew
- ▶ Remember that addiction is a treatable medical condition, not a choice
- ▶ Don't judge, just listen
- ▶ Don't use slang such as "addict" and "junkie"
- ▶ Let them know that support is available

Visit [Canada.ca/EaseTheBurden](https://Canada.ca/EaseTheBurden)  
for more resources available to you.



**See the real impact of stigma**



# It takes strength to reach out for help.

- ▶ A lot of focus is put on being strong in physically demanding jobs
- ▶ People may not ask for help for fear they may be seen as weak, be judged, or get in trouble
- ▶ But addiction is not a choice, it's a heavy burden to carry alone
- ▶ We can make it easier for those who may be struggling if we share and normalize that **it takes real strength to ask for help**



# Talking to healthcare provider about opioids

- ▶ Using only medications may not take away your pain
- ▶ Treatment options (e.g., medication, exercise, movement, physical activity, physiotherapy, massage therapy or speaking to a psychologist) are most effective when used in combination
- ▶ Opioids, like all medications, come with risks and potential serious side effects



# Know the potential risks of using opioids

## Side effects:

Impotence

Nausea  
and vomiting

Difficulty  
breathing

Headaches,  
dizziness and  
confusion





# Know the potential risks of using opioids

Long-term use:

Physical dependence

Liver damage

Worsening pain

Addiction

# Prescribed an opioid?

- ▶ Always follow the instructions
- ▶ Use the lowest dose possible
- ▶ Take for the shortest amount of time possible
- ▶ Ask your healthcare provider about alternatives to treating pain



# You can't see, taste or smell fentanyl

Fentanyl is being added to many illegal drugs



# Signs of an opioid overdose?



**Blue lips  
or nails**



**Dizziness and  
confusion**



**Can't be  
woken up**



**Choking,  
gurgling or  
snoring  
sounds**



**Slow, weak or  
no breathing**



**Drowsiness  
or difficulty  
staying awake**

# Naloxone

Can **temporarily reverse** the effects of an opioid overdose within **2 to 5 minutes**.

An **overdose is always an emergency**. Even if naloxone has been administered, **always call for help**.





# Get a kit for free

- ▶ Take-home naloxone kits are available at most pharmacies or local health authorities
- ▶ No prescription is needed
- ▶ Go to **Canada.ca/opioids** and search for “naloxone”



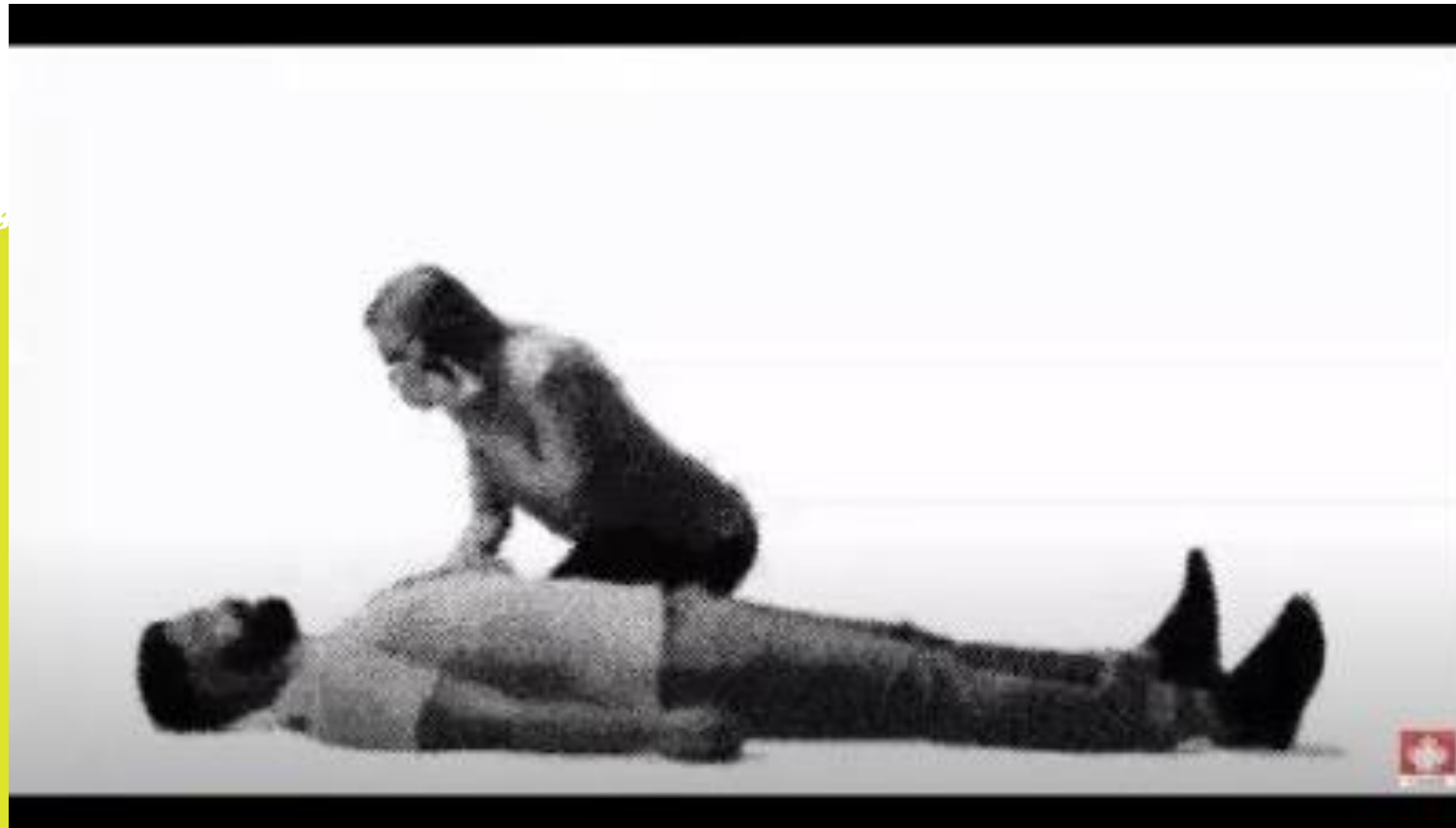
# The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act

- ▶ Even if you've taken drugs or have some on you, the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act protects you from:
  - simple drug possession charges
  - violation of conditions regarding simple possession in:  
pre-trial release, conditional sentence,  
probation orders, parole

**In other words, you will not get in trouble if you are high or have some drugs on you if you are calling to save someone's life.**



# Call, stay and help



If you think that you, or a friend or family member, might need help with substance use **support is available.**



**Men in trades**

[Canada.ca/EasetheBurden](https://Canada.ca/EasetheBurden)

Canada

