

THIS IS NOT WHO YOU THINK IT AFFECTS

LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH OPIOID POISONING

Opioid poisoning does not only affect one population. These are our collective experiences and the background on why we co-created this awareness sheet.

We came together to develop this awareness sheet because opioid poisoning is often misunderstood. Public narratives frequently focus on stereotypes, while lived realities are far broader. Families, patients, caregivers, clinicians, and community members shared experiences that revealed how opioid poisoning can affect people across ages, diagnoses, backgrounds, and circumstances - often in ways others do not expect.

THESE ARE OUR COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES:

“HE DIDN'T SAY YES TO FENTANYL.”

- “My son said yes to a drug. He didn't say yes to fentanyl. Everybody called it an overdose. That word felt victim-blaming. What happened to him was a poisoning.”
- “He was out after work. For whatever reason, he said yes once. It was one contaminated pill. That's all it took.”
- “They were just having some fun. The product they got was contaminated. He died. She was in hospital for months. They were productive members of society. This wasn't who people assume.”
- “Nobody chooses to die. You're not signing up for something tragic.”

“THIS HAPPENS IN PRIVATE HOMES.”

- “The majority of toxic drug deaths happen in people's private homes — not where people assume.”
- “The safest place to have a toxic drug event might actually be where the resources are. When it happens in someone's home, there may be no one there who recognizes what's happening.”



DISEASE MANAGEMENT & LEGITIMATE PRESCRIPTIONS

Opioids are not only used recreationally. They are prescribed every day for legitimate medical reasons.

- “My daughter was born with a hip deformity. She has needed pain medication her entire life. She's accomplished, responsible, and productive. People don't understand that she needs medication for chronic pain.”
- “People living with rheumatoid arthritis, severe GI disorders, or post-surgical pain may require opioids. There's nothing wrong with needing pain medication.”
- “In GI disease, there is significant gut pain that needs addressing. Opioids may be prescribed appropriately. At the same time, opioids affect gut motility. Managing disease and managing medication risks happen together.”
- “Most cancer patients will have surgery at some point. We are all given pain medication. If someone is in pain and can't remember whether they already took a dose, it can become accidental poisoning.”
- “Seniors and people living with dementia may be prescribed opioids. Confusion about dosing can increase risk.”
- “This is not about blaming patients. This is about recognizing risk across disease management.”





YOUTH & ONE-TIME USE

- “It’s those weekend parties. They’re not equipped or taught to recognize distress in their friends.”
- “Just because you have a naloxone kit in your backpack doesn’t mean you’re doing drugs. It means you’re prepared to save a life.”
- “Fifteen percent of students report opioid use. These are not ‘other people’s children.’”



LANGUAGE MATTERS

- “Overdose is the go-to word. But that word feels like blame.”
- “Poisoning acknowledges that people often do not know what they are taking.”
- “Rather than talking about stigma, maybe we talk about inclusion. This affects everyone.”



BYSTANDERS SAVE LIVES

- “Bystanders are often the first to respond.”
- “The security guards were sitting beside her. They had naloxone. They just didn’t know to give it.”
- “I have naloxone kits in both my vehicles and in every bag I carry.”
- “When you’re high and your partner goes down, trying to focus enough to fill a needle is extremely difficult. A simpler option matters.”
- “Every harm reduction message says: don’t use alone. That means the person with you needs to know how to save a life.”

OPIOID POISONING SUMMARY:

- Affects people managing cancer, GI disease, chronic pain, and post-surgical recovery
- Affects youth and adults across socioeconomic backgrounds
- Often happens in private homes
- Frequently requires immediate bystander action

- ✓ Preparedness is not endorsement.
- ✓ Carrying naloxone is not an admission of drug use.
- ✓ It is a commitment to saving a life.
- ✓ Carrying a kit may make someone else besides you feel safe.

We hope you share the [awareness sheet](#).



save your skin
FOUNDATION



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Mood Disorders Society of Canada
Société pour les troubles de l'humeur du Canada

