

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Opioid Epidemic: Call for Urgent Action That Can Save Lives Now

December 9, 2015 - An Ontarian dies from an opioid-related death every 14 hours.

In 2012, opioid deaths exceeded fatalities on Ontario's roads, and between 2000-2013, more than 5,000 deaths have occurred, up 463%. People dying of opioid-related overdoses include those using as prescribed and those using non-medically.

Many in Ontario are concerned about the public health crisis in Alberta and British Columbia, where deaths from bootleg fentanyl (a black market opioid) are expected to set another record this year. Bootleg fentanyl has already arrived in some Ontario communities. Ontario is unprepared.

On June 1, 2015 the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario (MDSCNO) released [Prescription For Life](#), a short guidance report of practical recommendations for governments and non-governmental organizations. The report is a key part of an appropriate crisis response that would begin saving lives immediately through expedited availability of naloxone, a \$12 lifesaving emergency medicine that reverses an opioid overdose.

Since June 1, significant endorsements and calls for urgent action and overdose leadership have come from the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, the Ontario Medical Association, Medical Health Officers, Community Health Centres, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Medical Association, bereaved parents, physicians and many more. A full list and the report is available at: www.drugstrategy.ca.

An estimated 328 Ontarians have died from opioid-related cause since Prescription For Life was released. No response to, or action on, Prescription For Life has been received from the Province.

The MDSCNO and many others are again calling on the Provincial and Federal governments for leadership and expedited naloxone access to reduce the record number of preventable deaths. The media and others are encouraged to highlight this issue given epidemic levels of overdose fatalities in Ontario, and across Canada.

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The Municipal Drug Strategy Co-ordinator's Network of Ontario was formed in 2008 and members work in more than 155 municipalities, counties, townships and First Nations communities across Ontario in multi-sectoral initiatives to prevent and reduce the harms that can arise from the use of alcohol, prescription medications and/or illegal substances. Members work collaboratively in communities to advance integrated, evidence-based initiatives in prevention, harm reduction, recovery and enforcement-justice. The MDSCNO has no conflicts to declare and receives no funding.

FAST FACTS:

Canada leads all nations in opioid consumption. Sales of prescription opioids and opioid overdose deaths continue to rise in Canada. The opioid epidemic has been called 'the worst drug safety crisis in Canadian history.' Ontario has been called the 'epicentre of the opioid crisis'.

An Opioid Overdose is a Medical Emergency, and:

- Seconds matter.
- A victim cannot save themselves.
- Witnesses to an overdose are the very first responders.
- Opioids include painkillers like oxycodone, hydromorphone, fentanyl, methadone, codeine etc.



Those at-risk of an opioid overdose include people using as prescribed or non-medically, addicted or not. Describing people at-risk as 'addicts' and/or 'abusers' is popular, but not accurate.

The presence of bootleg fentanyl in Ontario adds urgency to the opioid epidemic if we are to avoid the massive increase of deaths seen in Alberta. Ontario is unprepared: there is no monitoring, no plan and no crisis response in place.

Ontario: Deaths

Cause of Death	Year(s)	Deaths	Emergency medicine	ODB Coverage
Opioid-related ¹	2000 - 2013	4984	naloxone	No
Anaphylaxis ²	1986 - 2011	92	epinephrine	Yes
Opioid-related ¹	2012	595		
Motor Vehicle ³ Collisions	2012	568		

Bootleg Fentanyl Deaths in Alberta⁴

Year	Deaths
2011	6
2012	29
2013	66
2014	120
2015: first 9mths	213

1. Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario (2015). Unpublished, Data for opioid-detected deaths among Ontarians, 2000-2013. May 2015.
 2. Xu, Y. S., Kastner, M., Harada, L., Xu, A., Salter, J., & Waserman, S. (2014). Anaphylaxis-related deaths in Ontario: a retrospective review of cases from 1986 to 2011. *Allergy, Asthma & Clinical Immunology*, 10(1), 38.
 3. Ontario Road Safety Annual Report 2012. Ontario Ministry of Transportation. 2015.
 4. Alberta Department of Justice and Solicitor General, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 2015.

Naloxone is:

- An opioid antagonist- a (temporary) antidote for an opioid-related overdose.
- Cheap (approximately \$12/dose) and safe.
- A proven lifesaver.
- Similar to epinephrine (e.g. EpiPen®) for anaphylaxis.

Naloxone is a WHO-recommended Essential Medicine:
The "safest, most efficacious and cost-effective medicine for priority conditions."



One person dies every 14 hours from an opioid-related overdose in Ontario.

