

December 18, 2020

The Honourable Patty Hajdu  
Minister of Health  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

**Re: Drug Overdose Crisis**

Compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, communities across Canada are seeing a devastating increase in the number of opioid-related overdoses and deaths, and the City of Delta has not been immune to these impacts. Delta Council recently considered the enclosed report regarding drug activity, overdose and deaths within our community, and unanimously endorsed the recommendations contained therein.

The overdose crisis is a complex and multi-layered issue that has to be addressed by all levels of government. The report highlights some of the coordinated efforts being undertaken at the municipal level working with school boards, health authorities, and emergency service providers.

We recognize the work already undertaken at the federal and provincial levels to end the overdose crisis, however, there is still a lot to do. In 2016, a public health emergency was declared in British Columbia to address the significant rise in opioid-related overdose rates, yet in 2020, approximately five people have been dying from overdoses each day in the Province. Accordingly, we are urging the Federal government to recognize the overdose crisis as a national public health emergency and work with the provinces to develop a comprehensive plan to address this issue.

...2

December 18, 2020  
Page 2

The City of Delta is committed to building an equitable and healthy community. We also believe that building an equitable and healthy Canada is our shared responsibility with senior levels of government. We are prepared to do our part and encourage the Federal government to recognize the urgency of the overdose crisis in Canada.

Yours truly,



George V. Harvie  
Mayor

Enclosure

cc: The Honourable Carla Qualtrough, MP for Delta  
Delta Council  
Sean McGill, City Manager  
Mel Cheesman, Director of Corporate Services  
Moms Stop the Harm



City of Delta  
COUNCIL REPORT  
Regular Meeting

To: **Mayor and Council**

From: **Corporate Services Department**

Date: **November 25, 2020**

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**Drug Overdose Activity in Delta**

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The following report has been reviewed and endorsed by the City Manager.

▪ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- A. THAT staff continue working with the Delta Overdose Community Action Team (CAT) and other partners to support developing a community-driven and evidence-based action plan and to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the overdose situation in Delta.
- B. THAT messaging around substance use issues and available resources be promoted via Delta's social media, using advertising space at Delta's bus shelters, and through other channels and community partners.
- C. THAT staff work with Delta School District, Delta Police and other partners to ensure that early interventions, education and harm reduction supports relating to illicit drug use are readily available to Delta youth and children.
- D. THAT staff work with Fraser Health Authority (FHA) to streamline sharing of overdose-related data specific to Delta to support evidence-based community planning processes in addressing the increase in overdose activity in Delta.
- E. THAT staff, in partnership with FHA and Delta CAT, create an online depository of resources and supports available to Delta residents affected by substance use disorders and promote it through its network of community partners serving these population groups.
- F. THAT a letter be sent to The Honourable Patty Hajdu, federal Minister of Health, urging the federal government to recognize the overdose crisis as a national public health emergency and work with the provinces to develop a comprehensive plan to address this issue, and that a copy of such letter be provided to Carla Qualtrough, MP.

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▪ **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to provide information about recent overdose statistics for Delta and the Province and identify measures being taken to address the issue in Delta.

▪ **BACKGROUND:**

At the September 28, 2020 Regular Meeting, Council received information on the increasing number of drug overdose deaths in Delta, and asked for a report back on the issue. The



overdose rate in BC increased substantially during the summer of 2020 and public health experts have linked this increase to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### ▪ **DISCUSSION:**

In April 2016, BC's Provincial Health Officer (PHO) declared a public health emergency in response to an escalating overdose crisis. The provincial government launched a province-wide multi-sector response to save lives and improve access to services for people with substance use disorders.

In March 2020, the provincial government declared a second public health emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first eight months of 2020, the province witnessed more overdose fatalities than in all of 2019. Public health experts suggest that the response protocols and processes introduced to prevent the spread of COVID-19 may be contributing to this increase, including:

- increased drug toxicity;
- disrupted social services infrastructure;
- social isolation and propensity to use drugs alone; and
- increased substance use related to mental health issues exacerbated by COVID-19.

Further details on contributing factors can be found in Attachment 'A'.

### **Overdose Activity in Delta**

The health emergency declaration allowed for the collection of and access to more robust and up-to-date data on overdose activity across the province, including overdose and fatality data from FHA and the BC Coroners Service.

#### ***a. Overdose Deaths***

In the last decade, there has been a sevenfold increase in overdose fatalities in Delta (see Table 1 below). So far this year, there have been 15 overdose deaths in Delta - a situation that mirrors many other Metro Vancouver municipalities with overdose deaths reaching historic highs, between January and September, 2020: Coquitlam - 22, Maple Ridge - 18, and Langley - 27 overdose deaths.

Indigenous people and males age 30 to 59 are overrepresented in overdose deaths, and the majority of people who are dying are using drugs alone and inside private residences, including social/supportive housing and shelters.

**Table 1. Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths in Delta, 2010-2020<sup>1</sup>**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Delta	2	6	3	4	2	6	11	20	20	14	15
Fraser Health	86	115	104	106	126	208	334	493	522	327	382
BC	211	295	270	334	369	529	991	1,494	1,547	981	1,202

Source: The Province of British Columbia, 2020. Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths in B.C. (2010-September 2020)

***b. Overdose Events Attended by BC Ambulance Service***

Between January and August 2020, there were 137 overdose events in Delta attended by BC Ambulance Service - 17 of those were in August alone. Compared to 2019, when there were 134 overdose events per 100,000 population, there has been a 97% increase in the overdose event rate in Delta this year, with 265 per 100,000 population (as of August 2020).

However, while Delta had the highest percentage rate change in the region, Delta is low in terms of total numbers compared with some neighbouring municipalities. For example, as of August 2020, New Westminster had 552, Langley had 1,023, and Surrey had 560 overdose events per 100,000 population.

***c. Overdose Events Attended by Delta Police and Fire Departments***

As of September 30, 2020, Delta Police responded to 41 overdose calls (including assist EHS calls) and Delta Fire to 31 calls. Over 75% of these calls occurred between June and September, and more than 50% were from North Delta.

**Delta Response to the Overdose Crisis*****a. Delta Community Action Team***

The Delta Overdose Community Action Team (DCAT) was established in 2018 as a community-driven collaborative group, co-chaired by Deltassist and Fraser Health. The CAT initiative was established as a part of a robust, province-wide approach to address the overdose crisis. Attachment 'B' provides more details about the provincial overdose emergency response.

Delta CAT members include Delta Chamber of Commerce, Delta Police, City of Delta (Social Planning), Delta School District, Ladner Business Association, Delta Optimist, North Delta Evangelical Free Church, Ladner Lighthouse Church and Alongside You Counselling. DCAT is a well-established committee and strong network of collaborators. Some recent actions taken by the group include:

- “Lunch and Learn” presentations and training to reduce stigma and barriers for people struggling with substance use disorders to access supports.
- With a high percentage of workers in the trades and transport industry dying from overdoses, DCAT targeted the trades sector in Delta, and launched a public awareness campaign on social media to reach a broader and younger audience.

DCAT typically meets monthly but some activities have had to be postponed due to the pandemic. At the last meeting on October 30, the latest overdose statistics and Delta's harm reduction capacities were discussed as well as the need for more engagement with the Langley CAT, FHA Harm Reduction team and Delta's Divisions of Family Practice.

It is recommended that staff continue working with DCAT and other partners, such as Delta School District, to support developing a community-driven and evidence-based action plan to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the overdose situation in Delta as well as the needs of Delta's diverse community groups, including school students (Recommendation A).



Further to comments made by Mayor Harvie around youth substance use in particular, it is recommended that as part of its work with community partners, City of Delta ensure that messaging around substance use issues and available resources be promoted via Delta's social media, using advertising space at Delta's bus shelters, and through other channels and community partners, to increase the reach of this information across all segments of the Delta community (Recommendation B).

### ***b. Counselling Services***

The Little House Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Society (LHS) receives annual funding of \$75,000 from the City of Delta to provide counselling and intervention services related to alcohol and drug addiction and recovery for Delta residents and their families. It also provides substance use education programs to the community, including youth education and prevention initiatives. In 2020, LHS provided services to 75 clients with substance use disorders. Demand was particularly high during the summer months of 2020, when 167 hours of counselling services were provided (compared to 105 hours during the same period in 2019).

Delta also provides annual funding of \$115,000 to support children and youth at risk through the provision of counselling services. The Delta Police Youth Liaison Team works closely with Delta School District to identify at risk children and youth and refer them to these counselling services.

### ***c. Fentanyl Outreach Program by Delta Police***

Delta Police leads a fentanyl outreach program in Delta's high schools, in partnership with FHA and Delta School District. Over the last two years, close to 2,000 Grade 8 students have participated. Work is underway to introduce this program virtually. A follow-up program on fentanyl and the overdose crisis is delivered in Grade 9-12. Delta School District is also working with various other partners in the delivery of diverse educational and preventative harm reduction programming to students and parents.

It is recommended that staff work with Delta School District, Delta Police and other partners to ensure that early interventions, education and harm reduction supports are readily available to Delta youth and children. (Recommendation C).

### ***d. The Naloxone Program***

Naloxone is a safe and highly effective medication that reverses the effects of opioid overdose. Naloxone kits are distributed by Fraser Health through non-government organizations, community pharmacies and public sector employees. More information, specific to Delta, is provided in Attachment 'C'. Cumulatively, 82 Naloxone kits have been administered by Delta's Police and Fire Departments in the last four years: 32 by police officers and 50 by firefighters.

### ***e. Other Harm Reduction Measures***

BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) and the Overdose Emergency Response Centre work in partnership in providing coordination, monitoring, and evaluation related to the overdose emergency. BCCDC publishes regular reports; however, data is publically available only at the provincial/regional health authority levels. Community-level data, specific to Delta,

was requested by staff from Fraser Health Authority and some of these indicators are summarized in Attachment 'D'. According to FHA, the number of Opioid Agonist Treatment prescribers in Delta while remaining low, has doubled in 2020.

Having access to community-level data is critical in effective community planning processes and would help create a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic in our communities and the effectiveness of overdose response mechanisms in Delta. Staff will continue working with Fraser Health to streamline sharing of overdose-related data specific to Delta. (Recommendation D).

The research conducted for this report revealed the multitude of supports and programs available to people with substance use disorders in Delta. It is recommended that staff compile these identified resources into an online depository that will be shared with and promoted through community partner networks (Recommendation E).

Finally, particularly given the significant impacts on vulnerable populations of the dual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the overdose crisis not only in British Columbia but across the country, it is recommended that the federal government be urged to recognize the overdose crisis as a national public health emergency and work with the provinces and territories to develop and advance a comprehensive action plan for addressing these issues on a priority basis (Recommendation F).

#### **Implications:**

COVID-19 Implications – In 2020, British Columbia is simultaneously addressing two devastating health emergencies: the COVID-19 pandemic and overdose. These dual public health emergencies have put already marginalized, vulnerable people who use drugs and are living with addiction at higher risk.

Foundation for the Future Implications – Substance misuse was identified as one of the areas of focus in the Social Pursuit pillar in Delta's Foundation for the Future.

Financial Implications - There are no financial implications associated with this report.



#### **CONCLUSION:**

The illicit overdose rate in British Columbia increased substantially during the summer of 2020. Delta's rate of overdose events attended by B.C. Ambulance Services has also markedly increased. While Delta has robust social services infrastructure to support people with substance use disorders, having access to a full spectrum of up-to-date community-level data on overdose activity and information about culturally-sensitive resources available to various communities in Delta would improve the effectiveness of community planning efforts. In addition, to address this complex issue effectively, it is imperative that all levels of government and community partners work together to develop and implement a comprehensive action plan. Staff will report back with material updates as required.



Mel Cheesman  
Director of Corporate Services

This report has been prepared in consultation with the following listed departments.

Concurring Departments		
Department	Name	Signature
Fire & Emergency Services	Paul Scholfield	
Police	Neil Dubord	

▪ **ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Increase in Overdose Deaths and Events: Contributing Factors
- B. Provincial Response to Overdose Crisis
- C. Map: Where to find take home Naloxone Kits in Delta
- D. Delta's Overdose Response Indicators At-A-Glance

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<sup>i</sup> The illicit drug toxicity category includes the following: • Street drugs (Controlled and illegal drugs: heroin, cocaine, MDMA, methamphetamine, illicit fentanyl etc.). • Medications not prescribed to the decedent but obtained/purchased on the street, from unknown means or where origin of drug not known. • Combinations of the above with prescribed medications



## Increase in Overdose Deaths and Events: Contributing Factors

It is difficult and premature to fully understand all the reasons causing a significant increase in overdose events and deaths in B.C. Public health experts and service providers suggest that some of the measures enacted to prevent the spread of COVID-19 may have resulted in unintentional and negative consequences for those with substance use disorder. The following was observed in 2020:<sup>i</sup>

- **Increased drug toxicity:** Border closures and shipment disruption can potentially affect the supply chain and lead to more toxic substances in the drug supply. According to the B.C. Coroners Service, fentanyl and analogues appear to be fueling the rise in opioid-related deaths. Among the drug types involved in completed illicit drug toxicity death investigations, illicit fentanyl had increased from 5% in 2012 to 87% in 2019.<sup>ii</sup>
- **Disrupted social services infrastructure:** As of June 2020, there were 32 overdose prevention sites (OPS) and supervised consumption services (SCS) sites in B.C.; five OPS and two SCS were in Fraser region.<sup>iii</sup> Although there has been a noticeable surge in overdose fatalities, no deaths were reported at supervised consumption/drug overdose prevention sites. At the same time, attendance at OPS and SCS was down by over 50% in both April and May of 2020 compared to the same months in 2019 and continued to be down by over 40% in June 2020 compared to June 2019. Some sites were closed altogether while others reduced their capacity or staffing, resulting in limited hours and longer waits.<sup>iv</sup>
- **Social isolation and propensity to use alone:** COVID-19 safety measures, like social distancing, go against the harm reduction measures promoted for substance users such as “*do not do it alone*”. Continued high numbers of people using alone plays a decisive role in fatal outcomes of overdose.
- **Mental health:** The same side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic – associated with mental health and wellbeing, such as anxiety, depression, etc. – may contribute to the observed increase in drug consumption.
- **General upward trend:** While there were some encouraging ‘dips’ in the last three years, the number of paramedic-attended overdose events has been high and steady since late 2016.<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Responding to British Columbia's Public Health Emergency. Progress Update. January to July 2020. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/overdose-response-progress-update-jan-july-2020.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Coroners Service. Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths in BC. January 1, 2020 – August 31, 2020. Accessed on September 30, 2020. Statistics for Delta for September were provided via email

<sup>iii</sup> BC Centre for Disease Control. 2020. Overdose Response Indicator Report. September 2020. <http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Statistics%20and%20Research/Statistics%20and%20Reports/Overdose/Overdose%20Response%20Indicator%20Report.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Responding to British Columbia's Public Health Emergency. Progress Update. January to July 2020.

<sup>v</sup> BC Centre for Disease Control. 2020. Overdose Response Indicators Report. September 2020.

## **Provincial Response to Overdose Crisis**

### ***a. 2017-2020 Overdose Crisis Response Activities***

In 2017, the BC government took proactive steps to address the overdose crisis, including:

- The creation of a Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction (MMHA);
- The allocation of \$322 million over the next three years; and
- The launch of the Overdose Emergency Response Centre (OERS) which collaborates with provincial, regional and local partners to save lives and support people at risk from overdose.

The province's response to the overdose crisis has shifted towards harm reduction interventions, including the provision of naloxone kits to the general public, establishing overdose prevention services and new supervised consumption services, and expanding the range of treatment options, including rapid access clinics that provide opioid agonist treatment.

Despite these efforts, the number of overdose deaths remains excessively high. Public health officials and community advocates have made calls for alternative and more innovative harm reduction measures, including regulatory changes to decriminalize the possession of controlled substances for personal use.

### ***b. Overdose Crisis Interventions and COVID-19***

Overdose events increased sharply in the summer months following the start of the pandemic. Additional measures were introduced by the provincial government to try to reduce these numbers:

- Supervised consumption and overdose prevention services were listed as essential services in B.C. during the pandemic.
- Interim clinical guidance and protocols were issued to support health care providers in supporting patients with substance use disorders and who face competing health risks.
- A new *Lifeguard App* was launched which is activated by the user before they take drugs and monitors their response.
- In September, the PHO issued a public health order which allows a larger number of health professionals to prescribe pharmaceutical alternatives to street drugs.



WHERE TO FIND TAKE HOME  
**Naloxone Kits**  
IN DELTA

Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, is a safe and highly effective medication that reverses the effects of opioid overdose.

You can access **free and confidential** Take Home Naloxone (THN) kits and training at the following locations across your community.

1

**South Delta  
Public Health Unit**

1826 - 4949 Cance  
Pass Way, Delta  
(604) 952-3550

2

**North Delta  
Public Health Unit**

11245 84th  
Ave, Delta  
(604) 507-5400



**Lookout Harm Reduction  
Outreach Van**

Mobile service,  
call for access  
(604) 328-7610



**Community  
Pharmacies**

Find participating  
pharmacies at  
[towardtheheart.com](http://towardtheheart.com)



For more information: [towardtheheart.com](http://towardtheheart.com) or [fraserhealth.ca](http://fraserhealth.ca)



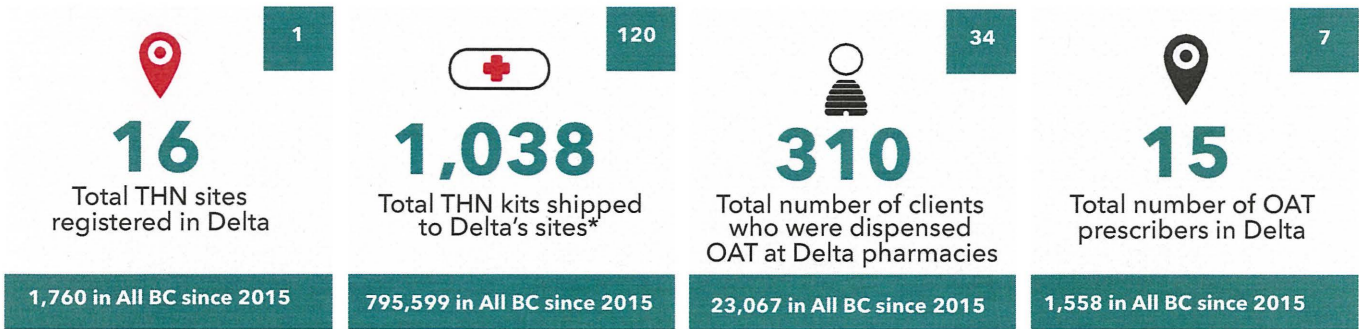


# Delta's Overdose Response Indicators AT-A-GLANCE



## Take Home Naloxone [THN] Program

## Opioid Agonist Treatment [OAT]\*\*



**Take Home Naloxone** program provides free personal THN kits to people at risk of opioid overdose or likely to witness and respond to overdose.

**Opioid Agonist Treatment** consists of a range of drug treatments for adults and youth with varying presentations of opioid use disorder.

\* This number is most likely an underestimate as The Lookout Mobile Harm Reduction Van provides access to clients in Delta but their shipping address is in Surrey. Kits are not always distributed in or given to the individuals of the community where they are delivered.

\*\* Data is for Delta Local Health Area [LHA], which includes an area slightly larger than the municipality.

**Source:** Total data: BC Centre for Disease Control. Overdose Response Indicator Report. September 2020. | Delta-specific data: Fraser Health Authority, 2020. (custom-made data sets for Delta. October 2020).

## Illicit Drug Toxicity Death, Delta | 2010-2020



As of Sept 2020  
**103**  
Total number of illicit drugs toxicity deaths in Delta since 2010\*\*\*

**8,223 in All BC since 2010**

## Overdose Events Attended by BC Ambulance Services, as of Aug 2020

**137**

Delta

Overdose events attended by BC Ambulance Services in 2020

**4,105**  
Fraser Region

**Source:** Fraser Health Overdose Response Public Report - Sept 2020.

**265**

in 2020

Overdose events rate per 100,000 in Delta

**134**  
in 2019

As of Aug 2020

**+97%**

**Source:** Coroners Service Report. Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths in BC Jan 1, 2010 – Sept 30, 2020.

\*\*\*Illicit drug toxicity deaths reported by BC Coroners Service include illicit drug overdoses involving street drugs (heroin, cocaine, MDMA, methamphetamine, etc.), medications that were not prescribed to the deceased, combinations of the above, with prescribed medications, and those overdoses where the origin of drug is not known. For 2020 - preliminary data, numbers subject to change. Numbers include both open and closed cases.