



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

# Opioid Agonist Therapy found to reduce death among First Nations and other residents with concurrent alcohol and opioid use disorders

**Colonialism and intergenerational trauma** have damaging impacts on First Nations' health, including harms caused by alcohol and drugs. **Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT)**<sup>1</sup> is a proven life-saving treatment and the FNHA is committed to expanding access for First Nations people to support their healing journeys.

**The main questions we explore in the study:** i) Does coexisting alcohol use and opioid use disorders increase the risk of death? ii) Does OAT help reduce the risk of death for those with coexisting disorders?

## Methods & Analysis in action



### We used data from:

Hospital stays, pharmacy prescriptions, emergency room visits, deaths and causes, etc.



### We examined the data for:

Who was prescribed OAT and for how long  
Repeated health care interactions for likely AUD<sup>2</sup> and OUD<sup>3</sup>



### We Assessed:

Deaths in people with AUD and OUD  
Impact of OAT receipt on risk of death.



### We compared:

The results between First Nations and other residents (non-First Nations)

## Characteristics of OAT recipients in BC from 1996 - 2020



Since 1996, 62,110 BC residents received a prescription for OAT



OAT recipients:  
10% were First Nations  
90% were other residents



OAT recipients had very high rates of mental health conditions, chronic pain, and other health and substance use issues

<sup>1</sup> Opioid Agonist Therapy (e.g., Methadone and Suboxone)

<sup>2</sup> Alcohol Use Disorder

<sup>3</sup> Opioid Use Disorder



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## What we found



Half of First Nations people who received OAT were found to have AUD, while a third of other residents had AUD



AUD doubled the risk of death for both First Nations and non- First Nations

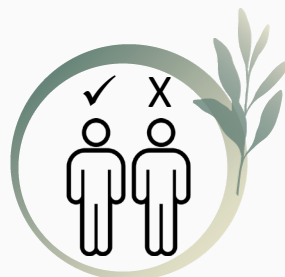


Observed mortality rates for First Nations individuals were three times lower on OAT compared to off OAT

## Interpretation of findings



Findings should be considered within the context of colonialism, trauma and racism – so as not to stigmatize and judge First Nations people struggling with AUD and OUD



Discrimination in health care negatively impacts access to care and treatment, preventing people from getting help



OAT and harm reduction programs are an opportunity to support First Nations people on their healing journeys

Barker B, Min JE, Homayra F, Piske M, Sabeti S, Meilleur L, Nosyk B, Wieman N. Opioid agonist therapy and mortality among First Nations and other residents with concurrent alcohol use disorder in BC, Canada: A population-based cohort study. *Drug & Alcohol Dependence* 250:110908. [doi: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2023.110908](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2023.110908).