

# FIRST NATIONS AND THE TOXIC DRUG POISONING CRISIS IN BC

INTERIOR | JANUARY – DECEMBER 2023



Harm reduction efforts are saving lives but drug toxicity continues at record high levels affecting First Nations families and communities across BC.

*The data presented here is specific to the Interior Region.*

## Toxic Drug Poisoning Deaths Of First Nations People

60

↓ 11.8%  
Decrease from 2022

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE DIED FROM TOXIC DRUG POISONINGS IN 2023.

This is a 11.8% decrease from the 68 deaths in 2022.

## Deaths of First Nations People BY GENDER

♂ 66.7%  
Male

♀ 33.3%  
Female

## Deaths of First Nations People BY AGE

46.7%  
40 Years and Older

53.3%  
Younger than 40

## Rate of Toxic Drug Poisoning Death

3.7x

First Nations people experienced a death rate 3.7x higher than other residents of the region.

## First Nations People are Disproportionately Represented in Toxic Drug Poisoning Deaths

4.5%

First Nations people make up 4.5% of the region's population.

14.4%

14.4% of toxic drug poisoning deaths in 2023 were First Nations people.



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

*This data includes only Status First Nations people and their status-eligible descendants. Additionally, our data is limited to biological sex at birth, which may misidentify two-spirit, transgender, non-binary, intersex, and gender diverse people. Data are collected as of February 2024, and are subject to change.*

The FNHA gratefully acknowledges the health partners that make this data available: BC Centre for Disease Control, BC Coroners Service, BC Emergency Health Services, and the BC Ministry of Health.

You may find this information distressing. Cultural support is available at Tsow Tun Le Lum Society. Call 1-888-403-3123 (toll-free) or visit [www.tsowtunlelum.org](http://www.tsowtunlelum.org)



**Toxic Drug Poisoning Events involving First Nations People**

**530**

**↑ 14.5%**  
Increase from 2022

**TOXIC DRUG POISONING EVENTS EXPERIENCED BY FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE IN 2023**

This is an increase of 14.5% from 463 events experienced in 2022.

**4.9x** First Nations people experienced an event rate 4.9x higher than other residents of the region.

**Events of First Nations People BY GENDER**

**♂ 57.5%**  
Male

**♀ 42.5%**  
Female

**Events of First Nations People BY AGE**

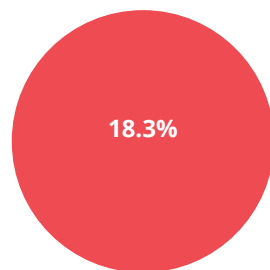
**31.7%**  
40 Years and Older

**68.3%**  
Younger than 40

**First Nations People are Disproportionately Represented in Toxic Drug Poisoning events**



First Nations people make up 4.5% of the region's population.



18.3% of toxic drug poisoning events in 2023 were First Nations people.

**NOTES**

- Most toxic drug poisoning events are non-fatal and represent when paramedics were called and responded to a poisoning. Events that were treated successfully in community and events where 9-1-1 was not called are not captured in this data
- Event data is only collected for people with documented BC Personal Health Numbers (PHNs), and is therefore likely an underestimate, due to missing PHNs for some events

**REGIONAL WELLNESS AND CULTURAL SUPPORTS**

**Interior Region**

IRSupports@fnha.ca

**Regional FNHA Staff**

**Manager, Interior Region Mental Health & Wellness**  
Debra Robbins

**Regional Addictions Specialists**  
Shae-Lynn Boyko  
Candace Giles

**Community Crisis Response Lead**  
Storme Sandy

**Indigenous Harm Reduction Educator**  
Alice George

**Regional Community Coordinator, Child & Youth Care**  
Cathy Balatti

**Mental Health & Wellness Liaison**  
Destiny Dendewicz

**Wellness Navigator, Substance Use**  
Hannah McGrath

**Emotional and Cultural Support**

**Interior Region Community-Based Crisis Support** – Call 1833-751-2525 (M-F 8am-4pm) or visit [IRSupport@fnha.ca](mailto:IRSupport@fnha.ca)

**Tsow Tun Le Lum Society** – Call 1-888-403-3123 (toll-free) or visit [www.tsowtunlelum.org](http://www.tsowtunlelum.org)

**Indian Residential School Crisis Line** is a national service for anyone experiencing pain or distress as a result of their residential school experience. Call toll-free 1-866-925-4419.

**KUU-US Crisis Service** – Call 1-800-KUU-US17 (588-8717) for an immediate response. 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

**Hope for Wellness Help Line** offers immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention by phone or online chat. Call toll-free 1-855-242-3310 or start a confidential chat with a counsellor at [www.hopeforwellness.ca](http://www.hopeforwellness.ca)

**Interior Region Harm Reduction Support**  
[interior\\_harm\\_reduction@fnha.ca](mailto:interior_harm_reduction@fnha.ca)

**Drug Alerts** - Text JOIN to ALERTS (253787)