

FIRST NATIONS AND THE TOXIC DRUG POISONING CRISIS IN BC

VANCOUVER ISLAND | 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 Vancouver Island Region.

Toxic Drug Poisoning Deaths Of First Nations People

85

↑ 9.0%
Increase over 2022

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE DIED FROM TOXIC DRUG POISONINGS IN 2023.

This is a 9.0% increase from the 78 deaths in 2022.

Deaths of First Nations People BY GENDER

♂ 55.3%
Male

♀ 44.7%
Female

Deaths of First Nations People BY AGE

32.9%
40 Years and Older

67.1%
Younger than 40

Rate of Toxic Drug Poisoning Death

4.9x

First Nations people experienced a death rate 4.9x 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.

18.1%

18.1% 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



Toxic Drug Poisoning Events involving First Nations People

792

↑ 32.7%
Increase over 2022

TOXIC DRUG POISONING EVENTS EXPERIENCED BY FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE IN 2023

This is an increase of 32.7% from 597 events experienced in 2022.

6.7x First Nations people experienced an event rate 6.7x higher than other residents of the region.

Events of First Nations People BY GENDER

♂ 62.0%
Male

♀ 38.0%
Female

Events of First Nations People BY AGE

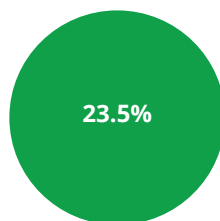
26.1%
40 Years and Older

73.9%
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.



23.5% 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

Vancouver Island Region
VIMHW@fnha.ca

Regional FNHA Staff

Addictions Specialists

Roxy Jones
Sara Daigle-Stevens

Indigenous Harm Reduction Educator

Marlene Stevens
Edward Joe

Mental Health and Wellness Team Lead

Hannah Watler

Mental Health and Wellness Manager

Alexis Stuart

Regional Nurse Practice Consultant for Harm Reduction

Danielle Kannegiesser

Drug Alerts –Text JOIN to ALERTS (253787)

Fentanyl Test Strips – Fentanyl test strips are available at all OPS and SCS sites in BC and you can also use the them at home. The FNHA will reimburse costs for up to 100 fentanyl testing strips.

Emotional and Cultural Support

Tsow Tun Le Lum Society – Call 1-888-403-3123 (toll-free) or visit 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