

BUILDING A **SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA**



**Public Safety Canada**  
**Fall 2019 Law Enforcement Roundtable on Illicit Drugs**  
Meeting Summary



Public Safety  
Canada

Sécurité publique  
Canada

Canada

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Public Safety and  
Emergency Preparedness, 2021.

Cat. No.: PS18-55/2019E-PDF

ISBN: 978-0-660-37168-9

## Introduction

The opioid crisis continues to be a public health and safety issue of significant concern to Canadians and the Government of Canada. This crisis has impacted individuals, families and communities from coast to coast to coast with devastating consequences. Recent data indicate that Canada saw more than 14,700 apparent opioid-related deaths between January 2016 and September 2019.

The Government of Canada remains deeply committed to ensuring the health and safety of Canadians and is taking a unified approach to address the significant rates of harm associated with opioids and other illicit substances. Collaboration with key stakeholders and law enforcement partners is a central component of this approach. As such, Public Safety Canada actively works within and outside of government to engage domestic and international partners and subject matter experts to ensure that effective and informed responses to this crisis are developed.

To advance this collaboration, Public Safety Canada hosted the third annual Law Enforcement Roundtable on Illicit Drugs on October 8-9, 2019, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The event provided a forum for representatives of law enforcement, academia, Indigenous communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals with lived experience to share insights, perspectives and challenges in responding to the opioid crisis (see Appendix A for a list of organizations represented at the meeting).

The two-day event followed the 2019 Law Enforcement Roundtable on the Opioid Crisis, which took place on March 29, 2019, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Building on the success of the Halifax meeting and other, previous, roundtables, this year's event focused on the following themes:

- Current drug trends and organized crime;
- First Nations perspectives;
- Research, intelligence gathering and information sharing;
- Supply reduction efforts;
- National and international perspectives and organized crime;
- The role of technology in the illicit drug trade;
- Collaborative approaches to law enforcement.

The roundtable agenda consisted of seven plenary sessions over the course of two days, each incorporating presentations and dialogue. Twenty-five presenters shared their diverse experiences and expertise. As with previous roundtables, the event provided a forum to discuss drug trends and a unique opportunity for participants to share their collective perspectives, challenges and opportunities in advancing law enforcement approaches to combatting opioids and illicit drugs. A summary of these discussions follows.

## Opening Remarks

Trevor Bhupsingh, Director General, Law Enforcement and Border Strategies Directorate, spoke on behalf of Ellen Burack, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Safety and Countering Crime Branch, Public Safety Canada. He highlighted the importance of understanding the role that organized crime has in fueling the opioid crisis; the need to view emerging drug threats from a regional perspective, such as methamphetamine in Winnipeg; and the importance of finding solutions through collaboration within and beyond Canada's borders.

## Plenary Session 1: Current Drug Trends and Organized Crime

This session examined the current state of the opioid crisis and emerging drug trends within the Prairie provinces and the role of organized crime in the illicit drug trade.

During the session, participants heard from the Winnipeg Police Service, Calgary Police Service, Saskatoon Police Service and RCMP “D” Division on the illicit drug landscape in the Prairie provinces and the nexus between organized crime and illegal substances. With few exceptions, methamphetamine (meth) was reported to be the preeminent drug threat in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and an emerging drug threat in other regions across Canada. By comparison, disparities in opioid use trends across the Prairies were noted, with the highest demand and associated harms being experienced in Alberta, followed by Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The use of methamphetamine, a potent and highly addictive stimulant, is often associated with erratic, violent, paranoid and impulsive behavior that is difficult to treat. The low cost of methamphetamines, their easy and inexpensive manufacture and the sustained high that they produce are attractive to both users and traffickers and have yielded a high-demand market. As a result, investigations involving meth have resulted in a 600% increase in meth seizures across the Prairies over the last 5 years. In many regions within central Canada, the prevalence of methamphetamine use has eclipsed that of opioids.

The impact of meth use has been particularly experienced in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where its use has reached epidemic proportions. According to the Winnipeg Police Service, meth use has contributed to an eight percent (8%) increase in personal and commercial robberies, a twenty-nine percent (29%) increase in property crime, and an overall increase in firearms-related offences in 2018. When compared to a five year average, this represents an increase of fifty-eight percent (58%), forty-four percent (44%), and sixty percent (60%), respectively. Meth use in Winnipeg was also responsible for sixty-eight percent (68%) of violent events and twenty-five percent (25%) of homicides between January and October 2019.

In Calgary, Alberta, crystal meth is the most common drug reported for use during visits to the city’s supervised consumption site and accounted for the highest percentage of drug seizures by law enforcement in 2018. Between January 2013 and September 2019 meth seizure occurrences grew consistently from 103 (2013) to 955 (2019). Likewise, in Saskatoon, occurrences of possession and trafficking in meth have consistently increased between 2013 and 2018. During this period, possession occurrences increased from 36 (2013) to 408 (2018) and trafficking occurrences increased from 17 (2013) to 55 (2018), with 2019 totals across both indicators expected to meet or surpass those for 2018.

The pervasiveness of methamphetamine in central Canada is increasingly facilitated by Organized Crime Groups (OCGs) who benefit from both its profitability and demand. These groups include traditional organized crime syndicates, outlaw motorcycle gangs and street gangs; they typically trade in diverse illegal markets and traffic a variety of substances. OCGs transport drugs using both established and novel trafficking routes and work cooperatively within the Prairies as well as into neighbouring British Columbia and Ontario. These criminal enterprises often operate inter-provincially and/or transnationally and use technological advances and knowledge of investigative strategies revealed through prosecution processes to adapt their practices. Law enforcement noted that intelligence and information sharing are key to targeting these criminal organizations.

The prevalence of meth across the Prairies, coupled with the ongoing threat from opioids, has not only led to community safety concerns, but has also significantly taxed law enforcement resources. Despite these challenges, a number of law enforcement-driven initiatives have been undertaken to counter the illegal drug trade and organized criminal activity. Such initiatives include Project Riverbank, a multi-jurisdictional investigation that successfully intercepted large quantities of drugs, vehicles, weapons and cash from across the Prairies and into British Columbia. In Calgary, operation Daylight Initiative was introduced to reduce the supply and availability of meth, increase intelligence on its production and distribution and provide public awareness of its dangers. Likewise, in Saskatoon, law enforcement are involved in a number of national working groups and provincial programs, including the Opioid Overdose Surveillance Program and Saskatchewan Drug Taskforce. These multi-stakeholder programs engage the justice and health care systems to foster information sharing and promote a comprehensive response to illicit drug use. They operate in conjunction with drug treatment courts, supervised consumption sites, and the identification of high-intensity drug trafficking areas.

Presenters were unanimous in their view that problematic substance use cannot solely be addressed by law enforcement, but requires a multi-pronged approach from a variety of stakeholders.

### Plenary Session 2: First Nations Perspectives

This session explored the impact of opioids and illicit drugs on First Nations communities with a view to sharing best practices and existing challenges in First Nations policing. Participants at this session heard about the impact of illegal substance use and related criminal activity in First Nations communities from representatives of the Police Quality and Innovation Unit, Community Safety Services Branch, Ministry of Corrections and Policing, Saskatchewan, and the Chair of the Board of Police Commissioners, File Hills First Nation Police Service, Saskatchewan.

Effectively addressing the opioid overdose crisis and illicit drug trade requires an understanding of its impact on all populations within Canadian society, particularly those most at risk. Presenters described how First Nations communities continue to be disproportionately impacted by problematic substance use when compared with the non-Indigenous Canadian population. Traditionally, many First Nations communities exercised their inherent right to operate a unique system of law and self-governance. However, a legacy of colonization, assimilationist government policies and forced enfranchisement has resulted in inter-generational trauma, punctuated by a loss of traditional language, land-base, and cultural identity. When combined, these factors have taken a devastating toll on the health and wellbeing of First Nations communities, often seen through increased incidences of substance use and related crime. The opioid overdose crisis in Canada, in particular, demonstrates the disproportionate impact of substance use amongst Indigenous populations as well as the correlation between trauma and substance use disorder. For instance, participants heard that opioid-related mortality rates among some First Nations communities, specifically in British Columbia's Coastal Salish Territory, continued to increase in 2018 despite a decreasing trend among the province's non-Indigenous population. Likewise, across British Columbia, 193 First Nations men and women died of drug toxicity in 2018, representing a 21% increase from 2017.

With increased rates of substance use within Indigenous communities comes an increase in criminal activity. Notably, First Nation reserves are being infiltrated by outlaw motorcycle gangs and organized crime groups who leverage these communities' remoteness and lack of law enforcement resources to carry out criminal activity. As a result, in addition to drug trafficking, many communities have experienced a rise in property crime, violence, domestic abuse, human trafficking and elder abuse. In

some cases, communities have experienced the trafficking of prescription and illegal drugs by community members and the genesis of Aboriginal-based organized crime groups.

Compounding the issue of problematic substance use and ancillary crime is the reality that non-Indigenous or westernized approaches to treatment, prevention and enforcement are not always sensitive to the diverse cultural, historical, and social factors that have contributed to substance use in Indigenous communities. In response, a number of social services – including law enforcement – are adopting models that are developed for and administered by First Nations.

With respect to treatment initiatives for problematic substance use, the Muskoday First Nation initiated an Intervention Circle that combines the Hub model of risk-driven intervention with ongoing multi-sector coordinated support. This initiative identifies individuals and families at risk of criminal offending and seeks early intervention by involving partners such as Elders, Chief and Council, social development programs, the RCMP, child and family services, schools and health care services. Based on the success of this model, the English River First Nation and Ochapowace First Nation have also adopted this approach.

With respect to law enforcement, there are numerous RCMP Community Tripartite Agreements and thirty-four (34) self-administered police services across Canada. Self-administered Police Service Agreements allow First Nations or Inuit communities to manage their own police service under provincial policing legislation and regulations, while Community Tripartite Agreements allow a dedicated contingent of RCMP officers to provide police services to a First Nation or Inuit community. The impact of self-administered police services in First Nations communities was characterized as significant and led to: a 22% decrease in incidents of crime, a 36% decrease in homicides, a 19% decrease in violent criminal incidents, a 20% decrease in assaults, and a 23% decrease in sexual assaults.

From a provincial perspective, the Government of Saskatchewan is making strides to deal with the illicit drug problem through grant programs, provincial strategies, and partnerships that embody collaboration. For example, in May 1999, the Government of Saskatchewan, RCMP, and New North Saskatchewan (representing 35 Métis and non-status communities) signed the Framework Agreement for Community Policing Initiative and Memorandum of Understanding to improve police and community relations in Northern Saskatchewan. In addition, the province has also initiated or contributed to a number of strategies, including the Saskatchewan Drug Taskforce, Crime Reduction Team, and Crystal Meth Strategy. Furthermore, the University of Saskatchewan is working with the provincial government to leverage cross-sectoral data and predictive analytics to address the growing rate of narcotic use and related mortality in Saskatchewan. This initiative uses information from law enforcement, corrections, social media, and emergency and healthcare services to create a model that will better identify current and emerging drug trends, increase disruption of criminal drug activity, identify high-risk individuals and decrease mortality rates. Community Police Boards and Consultative Groups have also been established across the Province, including in First Nations communities, to provide a community-based structure and mechanism for addressing crime and safety issues at a local level. Community Consultation Groups provide an opportunity for participating First Nations to focus on crime reduction and prevention efforts in addition to promoting cultural and traditional awareness.

Overall, presenters at this session reinforced the importance of First Nations ownership of services, collaboration, and community empowerment as key drivers in combatting illicit drug crime and problematic substance use in First Nations communities.

### Plenary Session 3: Research, Intelligence Gathering and Information Sharing

This session explored the importance of research, intelligence gathering and information sharing in addressing the illicit drug trade.

Panelists from the Drug Analysis Service, Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, University of Manitoba, shared with participants the importance of conducting relevant research and ensuring timely information sharing as part of a data- and evidence-driven response to opioids and illegal substances. Developing effective responses requires an understanding of the existing and emerging substances as well as the social determinants that contribute to problematic substance use.

Health Canada's Drug Analysis Service (DAS) provides scientific and technical services to assist Canadian law enforcement in their efforts to combat illicit drugs. With labs located in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, DAS tests over 120,000 samples submitted by law enforcement every year. In addition to identifying the controlled drugs and substances, DAS measures and reports the results of each sample, which can support investigative and prosecution efforts. In addition, DAS assists law enforcement in safely dismantling clandestine laboratories and provides training and advice on drug recognition techniques, drug trends and analysis, and evidence collection.

The work undertaken by DAS is critical in measuring the scope of drug trends as they emerge as well as identifying regional variations in the illicit drug market across Canada. For instance, using data compiled from its activities, DAS has monitored the evolution of opioid use, from the over-prescription of OxyContin in the 2000's to the recent proliferation of fentanyl-laden counterfeit oxycodone tablets. More recently, DAS has identified the dramatic increase of methamphetamine and fentanyl (including fentanyl analogues) found in samples tested between 2012 and 2018. Of the samples of fentanyl and fentanyl analogues tested in 2018, fentanyl and carfentanil were the most commonly identified substances, with the majority of samples originating from British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta, in that order. While originally conceived as a drug-identification resource for law enforcement, the intelligence-gathering and analytical capabilities of DAS has led to an expanded mandate. In addition to identifying substances and producing Certificates of Analyst, DAS also analyzes samples for public health purposes, issues advisories to health authorities, conducts special projects in support of harm reduction initiatives, and issues quarterly reports on its website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/controlled-substances-precursor-chemicals/drug-analysis-service.html>.

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) is a Canadian non-profit organization with a mission to address issues of substance use by harnessing the power of research. CCSA provides national leadership to address substance use and is a trusted source of guidance and evidence-based approaches based on research. Among its many activities, CCSA monitors and identifies data trends on problematic substances and their consumption.

CCSA data show that, across Canada, cannabis (37.3%), cocaine (23%), methamphetamine (21%), and fentanyl (5.8%) are the most commonly consumed substances, but that the increased use of methamphetamine has been observed at differing rates across the country. In British Columbia, meth is the most commonly reported illicit substance used in the past seven days among harm reduction clients and it was the primary presenting issue (excluding alcohol) for adults seeking treatment in 2018-2019. In Alberta, there was a 168% increase in stimulant-related emergency department visits between 2010 and 2017. From a criminal justice perspective, CCSA data reveal a significant upward trend in the rate of meth possession and trafficking violations between 2010 and 2018, with the highest rates being

observed in Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec, and New Brunswick in 2018. Identifying these trends and monitoring their status is critical to developing targeted interventions.

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) is a research unit within the Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Manitoba. MCHP performs population-based research on health services, population and public health and the social determinants of health. Such research assists the province of Manitoba in identifying and developing future health and social policy tools. MCHP's research is informed by de-identified data (data devoid of personal identifiers) from administrative records of Manitobans collected by a variety of government departments. These data are housed in the Manitoba Population Research Data Repository at MCHP and are leveraged to conduct studies on health and social issues. One study currently underway involves mapping methamphetamine use in Manitoba. This research, sanctioned by the Manitoba Department of Health, will use data from the repository to create an overview of meth use in the province, and will include the creation of heat maps to determine where individuals access harm reduction and other services. This information may then be used to inform solutions and develop effective responses to meth use.

#### Plenary Session 4: Supply Reduction Efforts

This session examined efforts to intercept illicit drugs transported through the domestic and international mail systems and at Canadian border points of entry.

Participants heard from the Canada Post Corporation (CPC) and the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) on the distribution of illicit substances through their respective postal systems. They also heard from the Canada Border Services Agency about their efforts to detect and interdict illegal drugs at ports of entry.

In addition to being transported across international borders, synthetic opioids like fentanyl and fentanyl analogues are being transmitted in small quantities, often through letter mail, with relative ease. The low risk of detection and anonymity afforded by this system has resulted in the mail stream becoming a significant trafficking channel for the movement of illegal substances. To stem the flow of these substances through the domestic mail system, the CPC has initiated the Inspection of Mail Program, which seeks to remove non-mailable matter from the postal system by using in-house expertise and current detection technologies as well as leveraging partnerships with law enforcement and public safety experts. The scope of this program includes coordinated inspections with law enforcement partners at major mail processing plants and in Northern communities; terminating contracts with illegal cannabis vendors; participating in stakeholder working groups; undertaking joint training with regional law enforcement; and, increasing detection capabilities and intelligence sharing. In 2019, this approach led to 479 intelligence-based inspections resulting in the confiscation of 3,236 kg of illegal substances, in addition to the termination of 101 illegal accounts and the inspection of 906 items in targeted Northern communities. Future CPC activities include formalizing a national illicit drug interdiction team; obtaining support for intelligence-sharing, resource allocation and detection technology; enhancing training; and, improving intelligence-directed detection capabilities.

In the United States (U.S.), the U.S. Postal Inspection Service is the primary law enforcement, crime prevention and security arm of the U.S. Postal Service. Central to the USPIS' efforts in combatting illicit drugs and firearms is the Contraband Interdiction and Investigations Group (CI2), whose mission is to protect postal employees, the American public and U.S. mail from dangerous and illegal contraband. CI2



employs agency strategies to enhance drug interdictions by conducting investigations and seizing illegal substances transported through the mail system.

On a national scale, USPIIS narcotics-related arrests have steadily increased since 2016, with 1,806 arrests in 2016, 2,320 in 2018, and 2,283 in 2019 (to October). Also during this timeframe, the number of narcotics seizures tripled and the weight of seized product more than doubled. Increases have been observed across nearly all types of drugs, with cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine experiencing the greatest increase across fiscal years.<sup>1</sup> Significant investigations carried out by the USPIIS and law enforcement partners have revealed the increasingly stealthy and innovative methods used by drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) to send illegal substances through the mail system. Such measures include leveraging cryptocurrencies and the dark web to ensure the anonymity of buyer and seller, as well as shipping substances using novel concealment methods. In combatting the opioid crisis, USPIIS has seized more than 890 items of mail suspected to contain synthetic opioids since fiscal year 2014. USPIIS continues to work with law enforcement partners to strengthen its ability to identify mail containing fentanyl and synthetic opioids, enhance its analytical capabilities, and improve its information sharing capacity.

The flow of illegal substances through the mail system is not only observed by postal inspectors, but also agents at Canada's ports of entry. The Canada Border Services Agency, which processes hundreds of thousands of packages and letter mail daily, reports that drugs transported in the postal and courier modes account for more than half (51%) of all seizures. Methamphetamine, heroin, fentanyl and cocaine are the most commonly intercepted substances. In addition to developing sophisticated modes of concealment to avoid detection and thwart x-ray technology, postal traffickers employ tactics such as sending multiple packages containing small amounts of substances with the hope that most will be undetected and opening P.O. boxes or drop boxes using fake names. These strategies frustrate detection efforts and pose significant investigative challenges for law enforcement. In response, the CBSA is taking a strategic approach to exploit the dark web through mass analysis and data analytics with a view to developing a better understanding of how threat actors operate and enhancing mitigation measures.

In this session, presenters emphasized the value of collaboration and information sharing among partners. While current jurisdictional agreements and legislative restrictions impact collaborative efforts, the use of Memorandums of Understanding, Joint Operations Committees, and cooperative training exercises were highlighted as being keys to success.

### Plenary Session 5: National and International Perspectives on Organized Crime

This session examined the current status of opioids and illicit drug markets across Canada and the United States and the role of organized crime in the illicit drug trade.

The session underscored the fact that Canada is not alone in experiencing the effects of the opioid crisis. Rather, this issue is of international concern and requires cross-border efforts to address. As drug traffickers continue to disregard international borders, international collaboration is necessary for successful interdiction. During this session, participants heard expert insights from the Criminal

---

<sup>1</sup> In the United States, the fiscal year runs from 1 October to 30 September.

Intelligence Service Canada (CISC), United States Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), and the United States Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations unit (HSI).

CISC is an inter-agency organization that provides intelligence services and products to law enforcement agencies to support efforts to combat organized crime across Canada. Serving an intelligence-gathering and analytical function, CISC works in conjunction with the Canadian Integrated Response to Organized Crime (CIROC), which serves as CISC's operational counterpart. While law enforcement (CIROC) is reactive, intelligence (CISC) is proactive. The CISC collects data that contributes to the development of two products: the National Threat Assessment, and the National Criminal Intelligence Estimate.

Participants heard that the size and makeup of each organized crime group (OCG) is unique, diverse, and widely variable. With over 1,800 OCGs in Canada, CISC has strategically allocated resources to investigate those OCGs with a higher threat level. Larger OCGs do not generally restrict themselves to one illicit substance and are importing an array of illicit substances. Seventy five percent (75%) of OCGs analyzed by CISC are involved in cocaine trafficking and the legalization of cannabis has done little to disrupt or displace OCGs due to the fact that ninety-seven percent (97%) of OCGs involved with importing cannabis are also involved in multi-commodity trafficking. It was noted that organized crime in Canada has grown due to an increase in criminal entrepreneurs that have harnessed the anonymity of the internet to perpetrate crime. In addition, the dark web has given rise to increasing numbers of criminals who are operating independently to implicate themselves in the fentanyl market, and rapidly growing meth market due to the relative ease of obtaining precursor chemicals used in their production and synthesis

In addition to OCGs, there have been increasing threats observed from outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs). For instance, the Hell's Angels (HA) is an OMG with global ties to other active OCGs in Canada. The organization has expanded across the country and fifty percent (50%) of organized crime can be attributed to their operations. The HA has increased their number of support clubs from forty (40) to one hundred and twenty (120). This expansion has resulted in approximately double the amount of criminal activity. The HA uses their coordination to ship fentanyl and methamphetamine together, contributing to the trend of polydrug trafficking. Their operations vary in terms of sophistication but pose a threat to public safety nonetheless. Violence surrounding OCGs is increasing and is commensurate with the increase in firearms-related crime in Canada, the expansion of illicit handguns westward from Ontario, and the escalating use of social media to facilitate the illicit drug trade. It was noted that many key players from the largest OCGs have been killed in the past eighteen (18) months both domestically and while brokering drug deals abroad.

With respect to importation of illicit substances into Canada, existing OCGs with networks and smuggling routes for cocaine and heroin from Mexico are shifting focus. There has been a large increase in fentanyl and methamphetamine smuggling from Mexico. Favouring profitability, OCGs are moving away from heroin and towards fentanyl. As meth becomes less expensive to produce, its street value is declining, leading demand for meth to increase as people who use drugs shift away from more expensive drugs to meth. Notably, Canada has been identified as a global transshipment country for fentanyl. Currently, there is a five to one (5:1) import-export ratio, with three hundred (300) different OCGs involved in importation.

To provide context on the status of the illicit drug trade in the United States, participants heard from representatives of the United States Customs and Border Protection Service and the Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Security Investigation unit.

CBP is one of the world's largest law enforcement organizations, with over 60,000 employees. It is mandated to safeguard America's borders and its public from hazardous people, materials and activities while enabling robust economic trade. Serving on the frontline, CBP officers are critical to interdicting the flow of contraband, including illicit drugs, which are destined for the United States. Once seized, these substances are tested, analyzed and identified in CBP laboratories. This process is essential in determining new chemical compounds being produced as well as identifying drug trends as they develop. For instance, participants heard that, by October 2019, over eight hundred (800) unique drug compounds had been identified by CBP laboratories with an average of three (3) new drugs identified each month. With respect to fentanyl, which is inexpensive and easily synthesized, over 3,000 analogues are capable of being produced – with potentially lethal results. Presenters noted that fentanyl seizures by CBP had reached an all-time high in August 2019. Given the increasing sophistication with which substances are being produced, it is essential that law enforcement and policymakers embrace the importance of drug chemistry in combatting the illicit drug trade.

Homeland Security Investigations is a critical investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security that combats criminal organizations which aim to exploit America's travel, trade, financial and immigration systems. Its workforce includes special agents, analysts, auditors and support staff across the United States and throughout the world, including Canada. HSI investigates a broad range of cross-border criminal activity, including financial crimes, money laundering, fraud, cybercrime, human trafficking, immigration fraud, transnational gang activity, and narcotics and weapons smuggling and trafficking. Participants heard about HSI's international operations to advance national security and public safety through investigations of transnational organized crime. In addition, HSI works extensively with domestic and international partners through HSI taskforces, including the Border Enforcement Security Taskforce (BEST), which combats emerging and existing transnational criminal organizations by engaging a full spectrum of domestic and international law enforcement partners.

Participants also heard about HSI's strong working and information sharing relationship with Canadian law enforcement, which is critical to protecting our visa-exempt border. One bilateral initiative that was highlighted is the Department of Homeland Security's Northern Border Strategy, which was established in 2008 to combat cross-border criminal activity related to drug and weapon smuggling, money laundering and human trafficking. While information sharing is key to the success of cross-border investigations, it was noted that jurisdictional and legislative restrictions can sometimes act as an impediment to cooperative bilateral efforts. Such impediments represent an ongoing challenge for cross-border investigative efforts.

Presenters reiterated the importance of collaboration and information sharing between the United States and Canada in addressing the cross-border movement of drugs. As the illicit drug trade is borderless, efforts to stem the flow of harmful substances should also transcend national boundaries.

### Plenary Session 6: Technology

This session examined how the internet is being leveraged to facilitate illicit drug trafficking and strategies being used by law enforcement and key partners to combat this method of distribution. Participants heard presentations from the Calgary Police Service's Cybercrime Support Team, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation's J-CODE Team, and the University of California San Diego's Global Health Program.

Discussions during this session revolved around technical innovations and how they are being leveraged to traffic drugs. Common challenges that were discussed in this session include: limitations to accessing different online platforms; lack of online surveillance resources; efforts surrounding undercover operations; and lack of coordination during inter-jurisdictional investigations.

Technological advances have greatly expanded the illicit drug market. As cryptocurrency becomes more mainstream, criminal entrepreneurs are being introduced to drug trafficking via both the surface and dark web. The anonymity of the internet provides an ideal environment for Canadians to gain access to illicit products and for new and seasoned criminals to further subsidize their income. Those deciding to venture into criminal entrepreneurship are often unorganized, work in isolation and have no previous criminal or violent history. Through both the surface and dark web, criminal networks are being established nationally and internationally with sensitive information being shared instantly resulting in increased organized crime activity.

The anonymous nature and sophistication of both the surface and dark web sites has paved the way for a modernized landscape for drug trafficking. In conjunction with the protection afforded by the web through protected websites. The use of various encryption software like “Tor” (an internet browser that enables dark web access and anonymous communication) allows for completely anonymous transactions between both buyer and seller. With continuous advances in technology, presenters noted the increase in the use of mobile applications to traffic illicit substances. Encrypted peer-to-peer communication is being used, thus preventing a third party from accessing raw messages. As the sender transmits an encrypted message, only the intended recipient's device will be able to decrypt it, which prevents law enforcement agencies from viewing messages pertaining to illicit activity. The additional anonymity that is created when using such software applications adds an additional layer of complexity to law enforcement investigations, as attributing online personas to real-world identities is a complex and time-consuming process.

While technological innovations aid traffickers, there is also an opportunity for law enforcement to leverage this technology during investigations. Presenters from the Calgary Police Service’s Cybercrime Support Team noted that law enforcement capabilities with respect to surface and dark web investigation could be bolstered by comprehensive cross-training, increased collaboration, and confidential information sharing between law enforcement agencies. For these options to be successful, swift responses to technological advancements, in addition to buy-in at all levels of law enforcement and government administration, is required. Some tactics that have proven successful during investigations include long-term intelligence gathering, back tracking online transactions to the source, and tracking purchased equipment to clandestine laboratories.

Further to the online trafficking of illicit substances, OCGs continue to show interest in the trafficking of illicit pharmaceuticals. As individuals increasingly use the internet as a procurement tool for budget medication, OCGs have capitalized on this opportunity by developing more illicit pharmacy websites. The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP), based in Chicago, is an international association which assists member boards and jurisdictions in administering its pharmacist license transfer and pharmacist competence assessment programs for the purpose of ensuring public health and safety. With the evolution of legitimate pharmacy websites, the NABP administers the “Pharmacy Verified Websites Program”. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the 12,000 websites reviewed by the NABP were found to be non-compliant with pharmacy laws and practice standards, thereby posing a health and safety risk to purchasers. With the wide array of online drug outlets masquerading as pharmacies and selling unregulated or counterfeit substances, it was noted that websites with addresses ending in “.pharmacy”

are considered safe for consumers. The Bing search engine has developed a pilot project in the United States to display warnings directly in its results for websites identified by the FDA and/or NABP as operating illegally. NABP has partnered with the (Canadian) National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities and the Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies – Canada to enhance the safety of Canadian consumers. Given the potential harm that illegitimate pharmacy sites can cause, it is essential to educate the public and raise awareness of accessing safe online pharmacies.

As part of a government-wide effort to address the opioid epidemic, the United States Department of Justice created the Joint Criminal Opioid and Darknet Enforcement (J-CODE)<sup>2</sup> team in January 2018. The initiative aims to disrupt and dismantle dark web illicit marketplaces that are implicated in facilitating the distribution of fentanyl and other opioids. It also brings together federal, state, and local law enforcement partners from across the U.S. government as well as agents, analysts, and professional staff with expertise in subjects including drugs, gangs, and health care fraud. The goal of J-CODE's past operations, along with the ongoing work of J-CODE partners, is to identify and arrest criminal actors behind the dark web and clearnet – or surface web – online sales. The next-level target is the dark web drug trafficking organizations. The final prong of J-CODE's efforts is educating the public on the dangers of opioids by contacting individuals who are known to have purchased drugs online.

To date, J-CODE has been successful in apprehending online criminal actors and could provide a model for other countries. Its success lies, in part, in its capability to share resources and expertise across multi-agency partners and its ability to leverage the investigative power of federal and international partnerships to combat the borderless nature of the illicit online marketplace. In early 2019, J-CODE, in collaboration with its international partners, executed Operation SaboTor, which resulted in the arrest of 61 darknet criminal actors, 50 account closures, and the seizure of 51 firearms and 14 vehicles, approximately 300 kg of drugs and opioids and over \$7 million (US) in cryptocurrency, cash and gold across six countries.

Recent years have seen an increase in the use of social media to facilitate the illicit drug trade. Social media platform giants like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (owned by Facebook) are being used by traffickers to advertise and promote their illicit products to the general public. Instagram is the most popular social media platform used by drug traffickers, who provide direct links to their illicit websites within the comments section of related posts.

Although criminal entrepreneurs continue to use the internet to traffic their illicit products, participants were informed of how artificial intelligence can be used to support law enforcement investigations. During their presentation, researchers from the University of California San Diego introduced their software application that searches and identifies linkages between the surface web, dark web, and social media platform postings. For example, machine learning algorithms have been used to search platforms like Twitter and Instagram for distinct posts linked to illicit online pharmacies. This work demonstrates the important role that academia plays in advancing law enforcement's technological capabilities to reduce illegal online activity. Holding events for the public such as the Opioids Code-a-thon are beneficial for tapping into innovative processes as researchers work on artificial intelligence to go from a big data set to a mapped visualization. Media have proven to be key allies in the process as they make information more accessible to the public than academic publications.

---

<sup>2</sup> The dark web is also known as the dark net, or the darknet.

## Plenary Session 7: Collaborative Approaches to Law Enforcement

This session explored how law enforcement engages with partners and the broader community to combat opioids and illicit drugs. The importance of collaboration was emphasized throughout this session when participants heard from the Community Addictions Peer Support Association (CAPSA), the Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team (ALERT), and the Abbotsford Police Service.

CAPSA is a non-profit organization of people affected by addiction that strives to empower individuals impacted by substance use by providing opportunities to integrate into the broader community through peer support initiatives and community engagement projects. They support all pathways to recovery and endeavour to collaborate with other organizations that provide services for those in need of help. In addition, CAPSA partners with law enforcement to both reduce the stigma associated with substance use disorder and help improve the wellbeing of police service members. During CAPSA's presentation, participants heard about the importance of adopting a communal approach to problematic substance use that engages a number of partners in promoting healthy and safe communities. The opioid overdose crisis, in particular, has impressed the need for collaboration with partners since no community is untouched by the effects of problematic substance use. The pervasiveness of stigma in society associated with substance use was also highlighted, as was the need for society to be conscious and considerate in its approach to problematic substance use. Changing the language that we use regarding substance use disorder is a critical component of this consciousness, as the language that we use can further stigmatize substance users and discourage them from seeking the help and resources they need.

It is essential that frontline personnel consider their personal wellbeing and seek resources and support. CAPSA's involvement with law enforcement partners is critical in raising awareness of first responder mental health, including the importance of peer support resources.

Participants also heard about the importance of collaboration between law enforcement bodies from the perspective of the Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team (ALERT). Demonstrating a coordinated approach to law enforcement, the province of Alberta established ALERT as a flexible, adaptable, skilled, scalable, multi-jurisdictional and specialized team comprised of twelve (12) law enforcement agencies across Alberta. ALERT represents First Nations, municipal, rural and sheriff services working in a coordinated umbrella approach to combat crime. While the organization addresses all pillars of crime, its flexibility allowed for resources to be dedicated to the opioid crisis as it emerged in Alberta. Participants heard that investigations executed by ALERT have resulted in the seizure of 60,000 fentanyl pills and 10kg of fentanyl powder, as well as the dismantling of four (4) clandestine labs. In the year 2018-2019, ALERT's efforts resulted in \$11.93 million in drug seizures. While cocaine, methamphetamine and fentanyl make up the majority of seized substances, fentanyl is the only drug with consistently increasing seizure rates. The collaborative nature of the ALERT program suggests that the opioid crisis is not only a law enforcement issue, but calls for partnerships and sharing of expertise among social services, education, health, and government as well.

Participants also learned about an approach that is being taken by law enforcement to promote compassion within the community. The Angel Program, adopted by the Abbotsford Police Department in 2018, is a diversion program originally conceived in Massachusetts. Officers dealing with civilians experiencing problematic substance use can call an Angel, a person with lived experience of problematic substance use. Angels work closely with the local health authority and assist people into various pathways of care. The city of Abbotsford received \$100,000 in funding to establish the program, which operates twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week, when feasible. One (1) coordinator and thirteen (13) Angels are staffed for on-call peer support services. The program received three hundred

and sixty (360) calls in one calendar year. Benefits of the program include relationship building, destigmatization, support in navigating the system of treatment options for clients, reduced contact with the criminal justice system and reduced contact with problematic substances for vulnerable clients. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including: staffing and over-use of Angels, lack of funding and resources, limited treatment capacity, ongoing Angel recruitment and safety, and information sharing with stakeholders.

Overall, this session examined the importance of collaboration among law enforcement stakeholders and within the broader community. It highlighted the need to advance partnerships, promote education, address stigmatizing behaviour and engage law enforcement in treatment opportunities.

## Key Outcomes

The event resulted in a number of key takeaways that will guide future drug policy discussions. These include:

- Methamphetamine continues to challenge law enforcement, especially within the Prairie provinces;
- The interconnectivity of organized crime groups and illicit drugs is increasingly sophisticated and complex;
- Intelligence-sharing and collaboration between both domestic and international partners is key to maximizing our collective efforts in combatting illicit substances;
- Enhancing collaboration among law enforcement agencies and between law enforcement and traditional/non-traditional partners is essential to developing effective approaches to harm reduction and enforcement;
- Gaps in communication and intelligence-sharing continues to challenge Canadian law enforcement entities;
- Technology has redefined the illicit drug landscape and is being leveraged by both criminal entrepreneurs and law enforcement to simultaneously promote and combat illegal online activity;
- Research, intelligence-gathering and information-sharing on the illicit drug landscape are the cornerstones of effective policy and enforcement measures;
- Indigenous policing services continue to face resource challenges; and,
- The postal and direct consignment system is a conduit for illegal drug trafficking both domestically and in the United States.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The discussions held over the two-day event highlighted the complexity of the illicit drug landscape. The expertise, information, and perspectives shared were invaluable as tools for learning and understanding these issues. This event demonstrated that collaboration and information-sharing is critical in the battle against illicit drugs and the perils they pose to Canadian communities.

The event concluded with remarks from Trevor Bhupsingh, who reiterated the Government of Canada's commitment to address the complex social, public health, and public safety issues posed by opioids and illicit drugs.

To maintain the momentum generated by the roundtable discussions, the next Law Enforcement Roundtable is tentatively scheduled for fiscal year 2020-21.



## Appendix: Organizations Represented at the Roundtable

- Abbotsford Police Service
- Addiction Foundation on Manitoba
- Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team
- British Columbia Ministry of Public Safety, Solicitor General
- Brandon Police Service
- Calgary Police Service
- Canada Post Corporation
- Community Addictions Peer Support Association
- Canada Border Services Agency
- Canada Border Services Agency – Manitoba
- Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction
- Canada Post Corporation
- Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations
- Edmonton Police Service
- Federal Bureau of Investigation, Joint Criminal Opioid and Darknet Enforcement Team
- File Hills First Nation Police Service Board of Police Commissioners
- Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada
- First Nations Chiefs of Police
- Health Canada
- Health Canada, Drug Analysis Services Laboratories
- Manitoba Justice, First Nations Policing, Community Safety
- Manitoba Justice, Policing & Public Safety Branch
- Manitoba Police Commission
- Ministry of Corrections & Policing, Saskatchewan
- National Association of Boards of Pharmacy
- Ontario Provincial Police
- Public Prosecution Service Canada
- Public Safety Canada, National Headquarters
- Public Safety Canada, Winnipeg
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Criminal Intelligence Services Canada
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police “D” Division
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police National Headquarters
- Saskatoon Police Service
- Statistics Canada
- University of Winnipeg
- University of California San Diego
- University of Manitoba
- United States Customs and Border Protection Services
- United States Postal Inspection Service
- Vancouver Police Department
- Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service
- Winnipeg Police Association
- Winnipeg Police Board
- Winnipeg Police Service