

# Non-Fatal Overdose Incidents in Federal Custody, 2021/2022

*Despite non-fatal overdose incidents in federal custody decreasing, and fewer opioid-related overdose cases, fentanyl remains the most commonly identified opioid.*

## Why we did this study

As part of ongoing monitoring efforts, the current study provides a summary of non-fatal overdose incidents that occurred within Canadian federal institutions in fiscal year (FY) 2021/2022.

## What we did

An incident search was conducted of CSC's administrative database to identify all reported non-fatal overdose incidents in FY 2021/2022 (April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022). Overdose incidents were included when the consumption of illicit substances led to medical intervention (e.g., administration of Naloxone) and/or resulted in a designation of Serious Bodily Injury. Incident reports were then coded for information pertaining to the incident itself, preceding events, and offenders' profile/demographic data.

## What we found

In 2021/2022, there were 123 non-fatal overdoses among 115 federally incarcerated offenders. This marks a 6.1% decrease from FY 2020/2021, and the second consecutive reporting period in which non-fatal overdoses have decreased (see Table 1). Compared to FY 2020/2021, the regional distribution of the incidents changed the most in the Atlantic, Ontario, and Prairie Regions, and remained relatively stable in the Quebec and Pacific Regions. Interestingly, among the non-fatal overdoses that occurred in the Pacific region in 2021/2022, 71.4% ( $n = 20/28$ ) occurred at Kent Institution.

A small proportion (11.4%) of overdose incidents included no information regarding suspected or confirmed substances<sup>1</sup>. However, 64.2% involved non-opioid, non-stimulant substances; 25.2% involved opioids; and 14.6% involved stimulants<sup>2</sup>. This is another noticeable difference from previous reporting periods, as opioid-involved overdoses were most common in FY 2020/2021. Note that 47.2% of the overdoses involved some form of prescription medication. Among the opioid-related overdoses specifically, fentanyl was the most frequently identified substance (45.2%,  $n = 14/31$ ), followed by suboxone (38.7%,  $n = 12/31$ ), and/or methadone (12.9%,  $n = 4/31$ ).

Many different stressors/events occurred before the overdose incidents, including but not limited to (1) general mental health issues, including other recent drug overdoses/suicide attempts (25.2%), (2) interpersonal issues with family, romantic partners, and/or other offenders (25.2%), and (3) issues relating to release to the community (e.g., recent revocation or denial of release, anxiety about upcoming release, etc.; 14.6%)<sup>3</sup>.

The profile of offenders involved in overdose incidents in 2021/2022 was similar to previous years. Specifically, offenders tended to be White (49.6%) or Indigenous (42.3%) men (87.0%) in their mid-to-late thirties ( $M = 37$  years old). Just over half (55.3%) were medium-security offenders, and the largest proportion were serving a sentence for a homicide-related offence (39.0%) or robbery (15.4%). Just over two-thirds (65.9%) of offenders who had a non-fatal overdose incident had a history of self-harm and/or suicide attempts.

**Table 1. Number of Non-Fatal Overdose Incidents in Federal Custody, FY 2018/2019 - FY 2021/2022 by Region.**

Region	Fiscal Year			
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Atlantic	2	12	21	6
Quebec	23	23	23	25
Ontario	35	74	28	37
Prairie	34	29	34	27
Pacific	16	36	25	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>123</b>

## What it means

The pattern of non-fatal overdoses that occur in federal institutions continues to evolve. For example, non-opioid, non-stimulant-related overdoses were the most prevalent type of overdose in FY 2021/2022, whereas opioid-related overdoses were most prevalent in FY 2020/2021. Nevertheless, fentanyl remains the most common opioid, followed by suboxone/methadone. Ongoing reporting of non-fatal overdose incidents remains crucial for minimizing substance-use-related harms, and for improving offender health and overall institutional safety.

## For more information

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<sup>1</sup> Due to limited and/or vague information pertaining to substances involved in the overdose incidents, findings are reported for both suspected and confirmed substances together and may differ from findings reported elsewhere within CSC.

<sup>2</sup> The categories of (1) non-opioid, non-stimulant-involved, (2) opioid-involved, and (3) stimulant-involved will not equally add up to 123/100%, as 4.1% of overdose incidents ( $n = 5$ ) were both opioid- and stimulant-involved.

<sup>3</sup> These categories will not equally add up to 123/100%, as 19.6% ( $n = 18$ ) of overdose incidents fell into two or more categories. Additionally, 37.4% of cases ( $n = 46$ ) had no information regarding precipitating factors.