

The Opioid Crisis in Indigenous Communities

This factsheet presents data from an investigation by ICT (formerly Indian Country Today) and Yellowhead Institute, drawing on data from the First Nation Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). The factsheet was developed alongside the Yellowhead Brief, *Opioid Crisis Devastates Indigenous Communities in Canada*.

01. Spending Increase in Opiates and Mental Health Drugs

What is fueling the opioid crisis among First Nations in Canada and how is it being addressed?

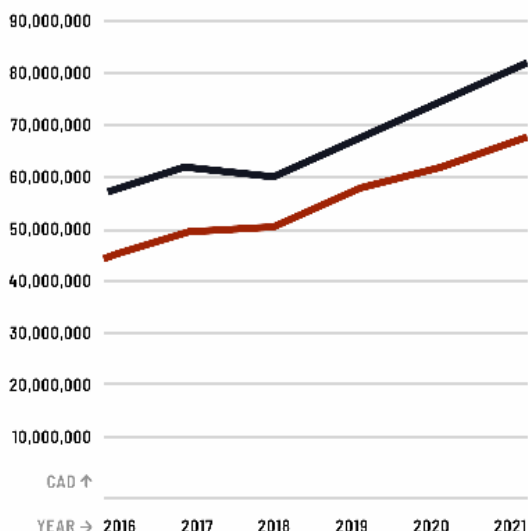
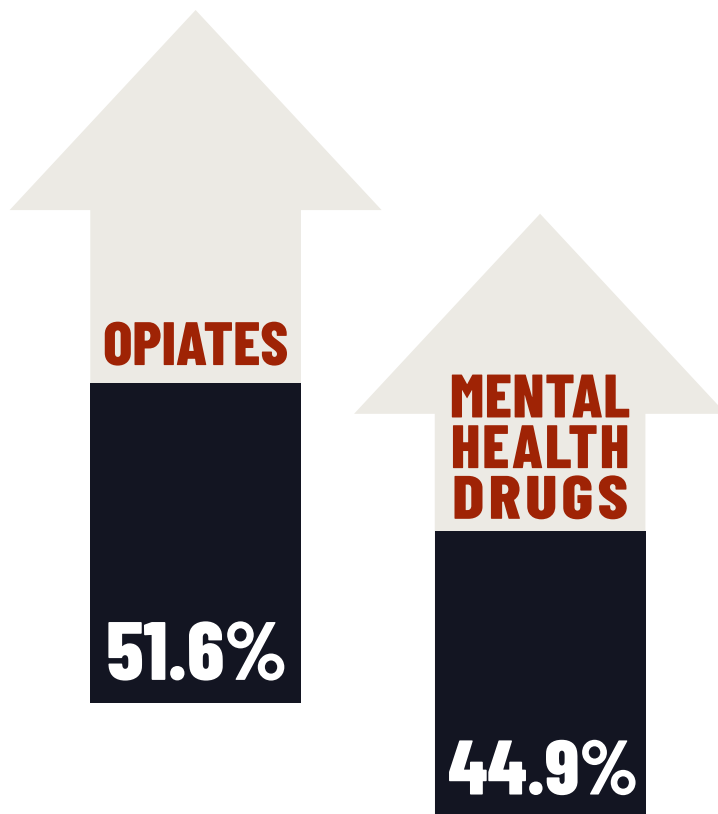
“It’s more profitable and financially rewarding to manage addiction, rather than to treat addiction. So that’s a problem that we have.”

- DR. MO SAMARA, PHARMACY MANAGER AT POUNDMAKERS PHARMACY

In 2016, nearly 20 million prescriptions for opioids were dispensed, the equivalent to nearly one prescription for every adult over the age of 18, the report found.

First Nations and Indigenous communities have been particularly impacted.

There has been a steep 51.6% increase in FNIHB spending on opiates from 2016-2021.



02. Total Expenditures for Mental Health Specific Drugs and Opiates

The expenditures for both mental health specific drugs and opiates have been steadily increasing; since 2016, there has been an especially steep increase in expenditures for both drug groups.



3,649%

03. Percentage Change in Spending on Opiate Antagonists and Partial Agonists

From 2016 to 2021, spending on opiate antagonists such as Naloxone and Naltrexone, which are used to block the effects of opioid overdoses, have seen the most significant increase — an astonishing 3,649%. Spending on Opiate Partial Agonists increased by 180%.

Opiate Antagonists

Medications such as Naloxone and Naltrexone that block the effects of opioids, preventing overdoses.

Opiate Partial Agonists

Medications such as Buprenorphine that activate the opioid receptors in the brain, but to a much lesser degree than a full agonist.



First Nations people [are] five times more likely than their non-First Nations counterparts to experience an opioid-related overdose event and three times more likely to die from an opioid-related overdose.

In Alberta, fentanyl was involved in 18 percent more opioid-related deaths among First Nations people than non-First Nations.

- FROM THE REPORT, *"THE OPIOID CRISIS IN CANADA: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE"* (2018)

In 2021, the Canadian health care system spent nearly **\$68 MILLION ON OPIOID PRESCRIPTIONS** – an increase of more than **231%** in 20 years.

Despite these numbers, prescription opiates can lead addicts to street drugs, if the supply runs dry.

04. Percentage Change in Spending on Amphetamines and Antipsychotics

Among the group of mental health related drugs, amphetamines had the highest increase in expenditures by around 118% between 2016 and 2021, followed by antipsychotics at around 68%.

05. Percentage Change in Spending on Heavy Metal Antagonists

Heavy metal antagonists are generally used to treat poisoning from metals such as lead, mercury, arsenic, and cadmium. Data from FNIHB reveals expenditures for heavy metal antagonists rose from 43.5 million in 2002 to 80 million in 2021, an increase of around 74%.

Not only are mental health and addictions an issue for communities, but the data also shows an increase in environmental contaminants.

