

# Co/Lab Substance Use Monitoring Framework: Equity-oriented Monitoring of Substance Use and Health



Canada's unregulated toxic drug deaths have laid bare the impacts of public health emergencies on certain groups and communities, in particular those facing multiple and intersecting barriers. They have also revealed the need for equity approaches based on relevant, actionable data on substance use and health.

We know that substance use and health are influenced by political, economic, social, and historical factors within society.

We developed the Co/Lab Substance Use Monitoring Framework in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, such as people who use drugs, service providers, researchers, and government. This included doing focus groups, as highlighted in the following infographic. The framework is based on a World Health Organization framework on social determinants of health. We adapted it to be specific to substance use and grounded in health equity, complexity, and intersectionality

The framework can be used to support a range of monitoring objectives. It can help identify whether laws, policies, and services exist that can help to promote health equity or that may increase health inequities. It can reveal where health inequities exist and how they are distributed, and it can highlight data gaps and future monitoring opportunities. Learn more about the Co/Lab Substance Use Monitoring Framework [here](#), or via the infographic on page 2.

## About Co/Lab

The Collaborative Community Laboratory on Substance Use and Harm Reduction (Co/Lab) is a collaborative network for research and knowledge exchange to promote health and health equity for people with lived and living experience of substance use (including alcohol, other licit, and illicit substances). Co/Lab activities are guided by collaborations with people with lived and living experience of substance use, families, health care providers, researchers, and policy makers, and are focused on generating practical evidence that can be used to enhance substance use services and supporting policies.

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Our project is based on the traditional, unceded, and continually occupied lands of the more than 200 First Nations in what is now known as BC, with the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR) located on the traditional territory of the ləkʷəŋən peoples with historical relationships with the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples of the Coast Salish Nation that continue to this day. We humbly acknowledge the disproportionate impact of the Toxic Drug Supply Crisis on First Nations, Indigenous and Métis peoples from all over Turtle Island as a result of historical and ongoing impacts of colonization.

We are grateful to all of our community partners who collaborate on the Co/Lab Project.



[colabbc.ca](http://colabbc.ca)



University  
of Victoria

Canadian Institute  
for Substance  
Use Research

Institut canadien  
de recherche sur  
l'usage de substances

# Monitoring conditions for substance use and health



The framework considers a broad range of influences on substance use and health for people with lived and living experience of substance use and communities. All quotes are from focus group participants.

The framework examines **structural determinants of health** that shape society, social positions, and access to resources. This includes how governance and a wide range of laws and policies can promote or undermine equity and health. It also includes the influence of social and cultural values and environmental conditions and events.

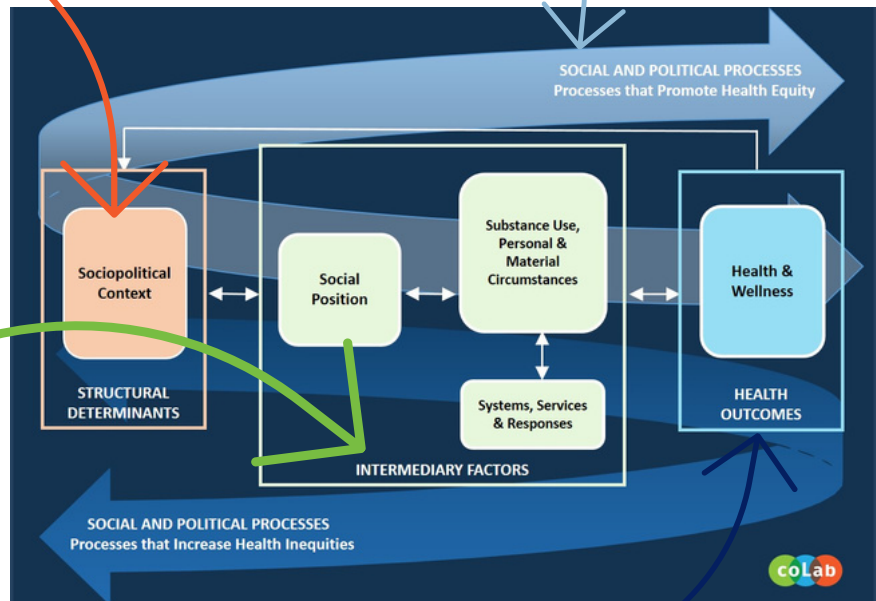
*Is there a gender lens routinely applied to policy? ... Or is there an Indigenous lens, or a decolonizing lens that's applied to policies? ... is that part of what any government is doing?"*

It considers **intermediary factors** that influence health. This includes living and working conditions, systems and services, availability of licit and illicit substances, and a wide range of personal factors including substance use.

*Go back and you'll see a lot of it is around housing, or it's around poverty, or the socioeconomic status. Right?*

The framework is rooted in **social and political processes** that work across all dimensions to promote health equity or increase health inequities. This includes how representation and inclusion can shift power relations to positively influence conditions for health, and how stigma, racism, criminalization, and colonialism negatively influence conditions for health and increase health inequities.

*If there's a measure of representation, or community involvement and decision making, that would be a good way of monitoring. So, what do people in power look like? ... Are any of them people who have used drugs, use drugs, or are connected in any way to the community?*



All of these processes and factors impact **health outcomes** of people with lived and living experience of substance use and communities. These impacts can be beneficial or harmful and influence quality of life, and substance use related overdose events, hospitalizations and deaths.

*Sometimes the way we look at equity is very deficit-focused. ... are there things that are counter story telling for monitoring like if people are thriving, ... are there ways to also look at positive outcomes, not just some of the ways that people are experiencing oppression or marginalization?*