

# 3 MYTHS about SAFE SUPPLY:

## Confused about the evidence on safe supply?

You aren't alone. Here are straight facts on what we know (and don't know) about safe supply in 2022.

### MYTH

**Safe supply harms people.**

On the contrary, **there is strong evidence that they are dying from unregulated fentanyl.** This common myth comes from arguments that safe supply harms people by increasing access to harmful drugs. But the evidence in Canada is clear: overdose and drug poisoning deaths today are caused by a toxic illegal drug supply.

*Safe supply can save lives by giving people who are currently using drugs an alternative to the toxic illegal drug supply.*

### REALITY

According to national data, 86% of overdose deaths in Canada in 2021 involved unregulated fentanyl. In areas of Canada where "safe supply" medications are prescribed to people who regularly use illegal drugs, there is NO evidence that people are dying from overdoses because of these medications.

### MYTH

**Over-prescribing caused the overdose crisis. Prescribing more will make it worse.**

This is another form of Myth #1, premised on arguments that link over-prescribing in the past to the current overdose crisis. The available research on the opioid supply and how it changed over the past 2 decades clearly outlines a complex set of conditions that varied across jurisdictions in Canada. However, one thing is clear: the current crisis was not caused by over-prescribing alone. It

*An emergency measure designed for people who are at high risk of overdose because of a volatile, unregulated drug supply is NOT the same thing as over-prescribing.*

### REALITY

was caused by the interplay of prescribed opioids, followed by rapid de-prescribing, AND the introduction of unregulated fentanyl to the illegal drug market. Further, the current context is not the context of a decade in the past. The current context is one in which 20 people die every day by overdose.

**MYTH**

**There is no evidence that safe supply helps people.**

In the past 25 years, research conducted in Europe and Canada has demonstrated support for prescribing “safe supply” medications to people who have a substance use disorder. For example, studies have shown that prescription heroin helps people to stay engaged in their health care and to reduce their illegal drug use and other illegal activities, when compared to other treatments. Because of an increase in “safe supply” prescribing programs in Canada developed since the start of

**REALITY**

**a prescribed safe supply can help people – as long as it reaches them and meets their needs.**

the COVID-19 pandemic, this is now an area of active research and emerging findings are showing benefits (in terms of reducing overdoses and supporting health). Because there are studies underway across Canada right now, we will learn a lot more in the coming years about prescribing a safe supply as part of our response to the current crisis – stay tuned and look out for more scientific evidence!

**We know that a prescribed safe supply can help people – as long as it reaches them and meets their needs. There are currently a lot of barriers to safe supply, ranging from drug policy and laws, to stigma, limited clinical protocols, and limited capacity to expand existing programs. True safe supply cannot be realized while drugs are illegal and the supply remains unregulated.**



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