



International Overdose Awareness Day

A Message from Michael Sandler, NNPBC Chief Executive Officer

August 31, 2022

Each year on August 31 we observe International Overdose Awareness Day. This day is particularly difficult because the Overdose and Toxic Drug Crisis shows no signs of easing and people continue to die of overdose at an alarming rate across this province.

This crisis is pervasive and does not discriminate. The thousands of lives we have lost are vital members of our communities – they are our family, colleagues, and friends and their loss leaves an unfillable void. We recognize the work and dedication of nurses and other health care professionals to support harm reduction and to advocate for changes to outdated drug policy, but further investment into this crisis is urgently needed.

NNPBC will continue to work with federal and provincial governments, partners and those with lived experience to continue to work to enact the real policy change required to abate this crisis. We must continue to focus on harm reduction approaches and mechanisms that are proven to save lives including but not limited to safe supply, supervised injection sites, supervised consumption sites, effective drug checking resources, full decriminalization, supportive housing and social resources, treatment for those who seek it, and de-stigmatization of those who use drugs. While we have made important steps forward with the introduction of RN/RPN prescribing for safer alternatives to street drugs and the federal exemption to decriminalize personal possession under section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, these are just starting components of the full-scale change which needs to occur. Real-world evidence shows that these approaches really do work, and we must invest in these systems wholeheartedly and without reservation.

To my fellow nursing colleagues, to our physician colleagues, to our colleagues in allied health, government, and to everyone in our communities – I ask each of you to remember the thousands of lives lost in British Columbia alone to overdose. Please remember that those who so needlessly died were loved and their loved ones miss them each day. My hope is that going forward agencies at all levels will better collaborate to address the Overdose and Toxic Drug Crisis and create a more just and equitable society for all.

Michael Sandler 

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