



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
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Canada

NL Substance Use-Related Harms Surveillance:

The Role of a Public Health Officer and Surveillance
Data Updates - 2023

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The Role of the Public Health Officer

The Role of the Public Health Officer

Main Objective:

- Build and maintain a positive relationship with the OCME to complete death investigation data reporting and help build OCME reporting capacity

Two PHAC streams in one:

- Substance-related Harms
- Public Health Death Investigation

Additional Support:

- Acting Data Analyst for the OCME through agreement with PHAC;
- 3 jobs in 1!

The Role of the Public Health Officer

Substance Related Harms:

- Provide national and provincial reporting of drug toxicity deaths with a focus on opioid and stimulant related deaths
- Build in-house databases and reporting tools (such as dashboards) for the Chief Medical Examiner
- Provide support provincially by joining working groups such as the Alcohol Action Plan and Suicide Action Plan

The Role of the Public Health Officer

Public Health Death Investigation:

- Support a national Chief Coroner and Chief Medical Examiner Collaboration supported by PHAC
- Sitting on death investigation subgroups (suicide, polydrug deaths)
- Connect local analytics team with national R and Python training
- 2022/2023 highlights → [Getting NL data online with the StatCan CCMED database and procured funding to aid in an in-house data analyst and new electronic DBMS](#)

The Role of the Public Health Officer

Other Highlights:

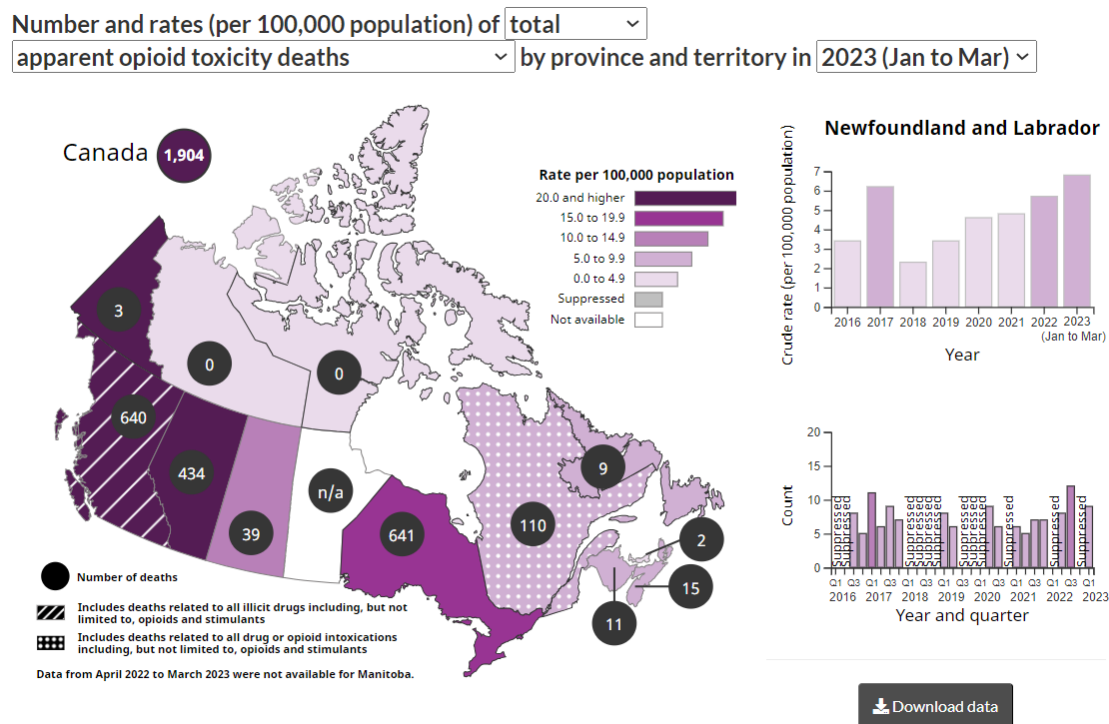


- Collaboration with Department of Research and Innovation to procure funding and hire Information Scientist
 - » This will allow for more granular data analysis and academic manuscript publications
 - » The Analyst, Information Scientist and Public Health Officer will work together to enhance OCME reporting and data products
- New public-facing annual statistics report and infographics (*2021 coming soon!*)



Surveillance in Newfoundland and Labrador

Surveillance in Newfoundland and Labrador

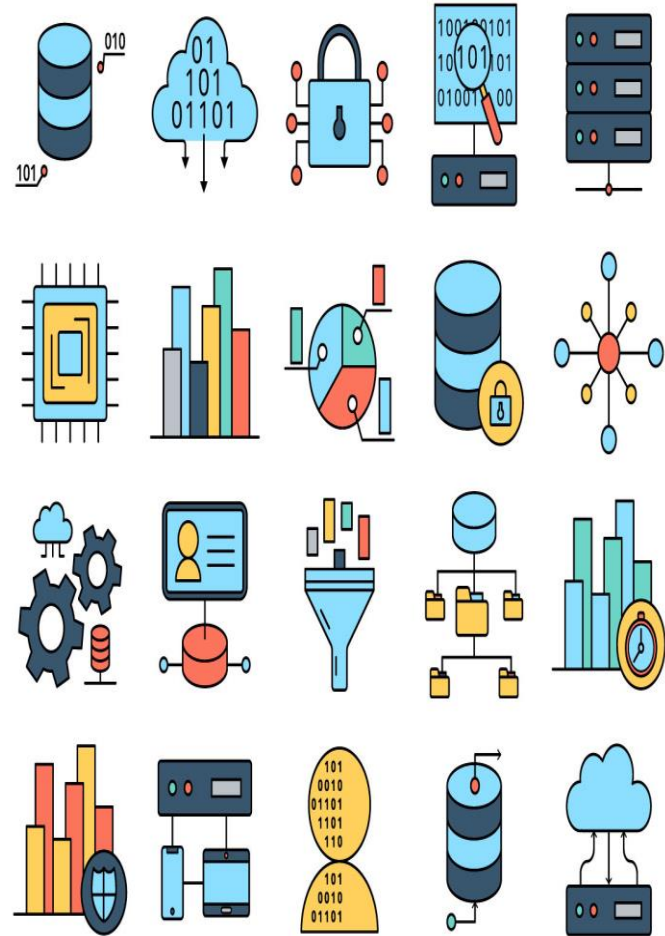


PHAC InfoBase: National opioid and stimulant death reporting tool

- <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/>

Surveillance in Newfoundland and Labrador

- Providing mortality data to DHCS, MH&A, NLCSU, NLCHI and other stakeholders to aid in policy, planning, and reporting
- Providing substance-related pharmacy data reporting to stakeholders
 - Opioid Dependency Treatment dispenses/ patients/ prescribers/ etc.



Surveillance in Newfoundland and Labrador

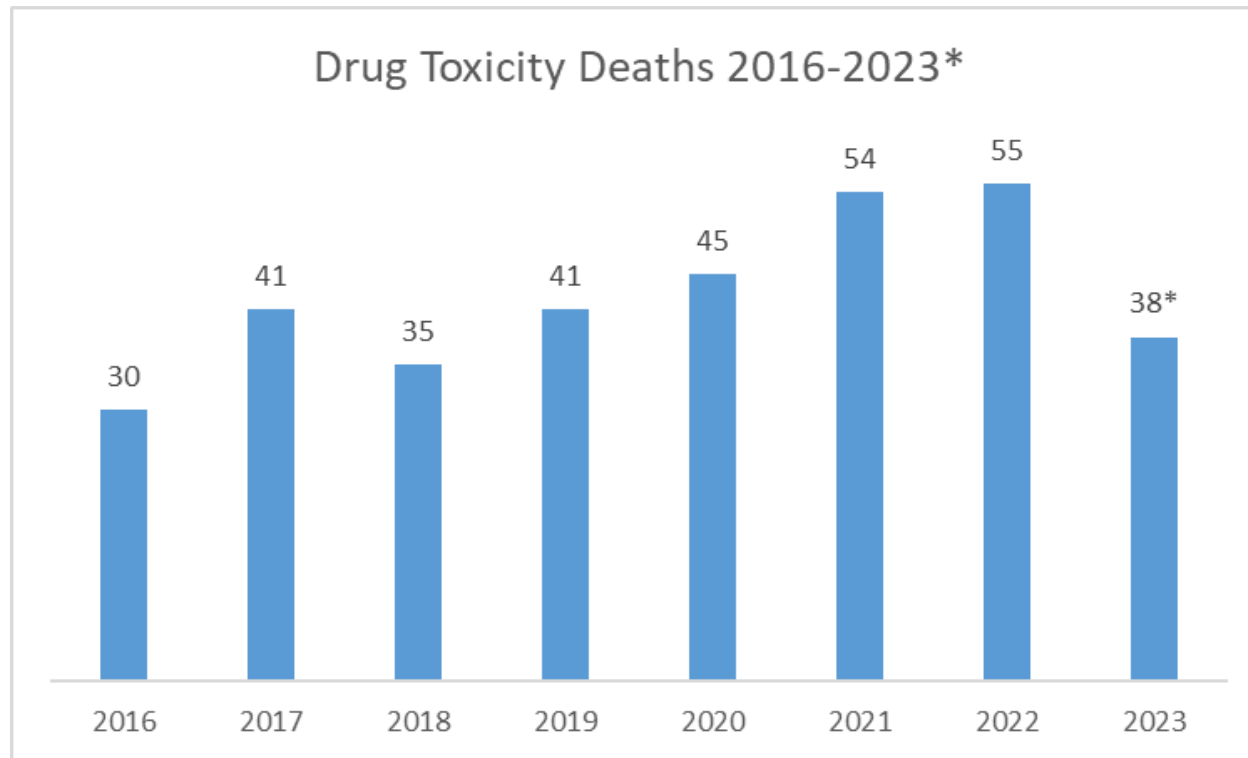
- Review and clean OCME data for current reporting window (2021 onwards) to increase accuracy of data into the future

Limitations:

- For any public facing data, values less than 5 (such as death counts per month and by health region) must be suppressed to limit risk of re-identification of individuals
- Toxicology is done out of province (the same for Atlantic provinces) in Pennsylvania
- Can only provide data on closed cases
- Cannot comment on anecdotal information or pending cases

2023 Drug Toxicity Data Updates

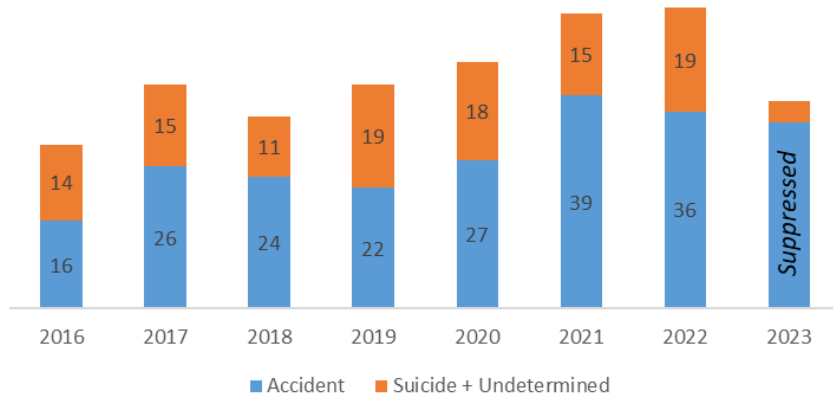
Drug Toxicity Deaths



- We see a slight but steady increase in the number of deaths in this province each year since 2017
- Includes all-substance drug toxicity deaths
- *2023 cases are ongoing

Drug Toxicity Deaths

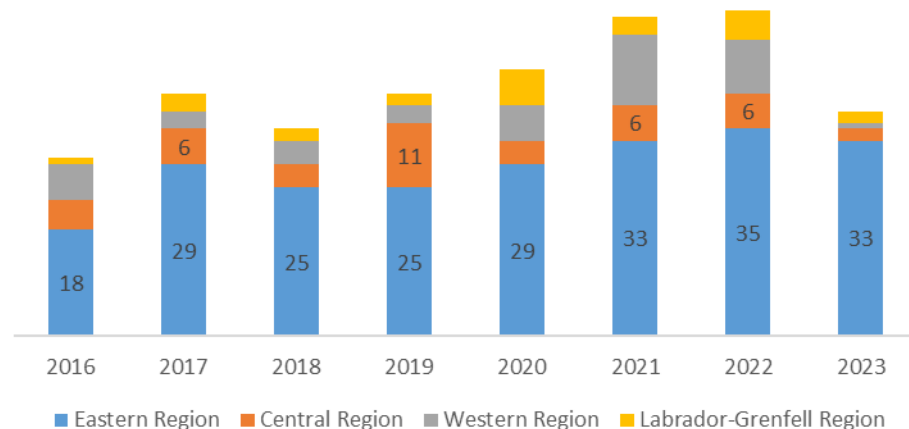
Drug Toxicity Deaths 2016-2023* by Manner



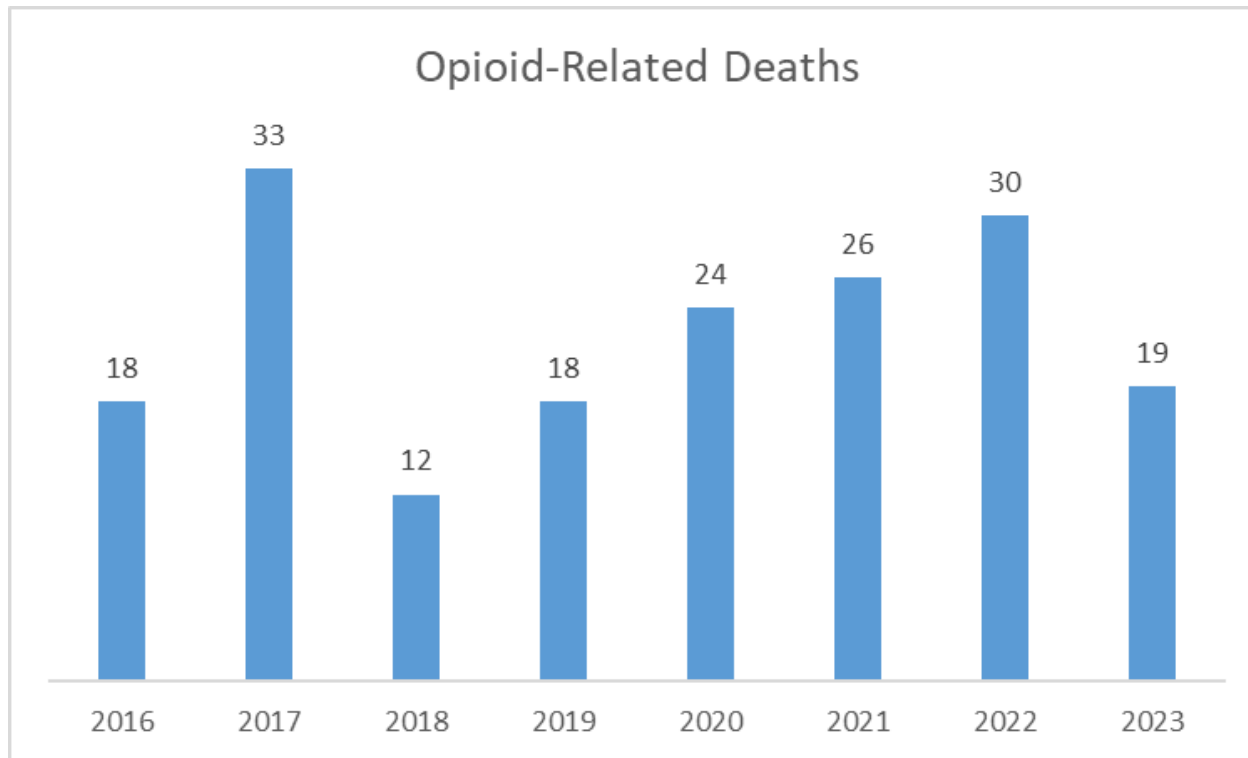
- Most drug toxicity deaths are considered accidental (seen nation-wide)
- Eastern Health has the biggest proportion of deaths

*** When values are <5, or a single value can be back-calculated, data is suppressed

Drug Toxicity Deaths by Region 2016-2023*

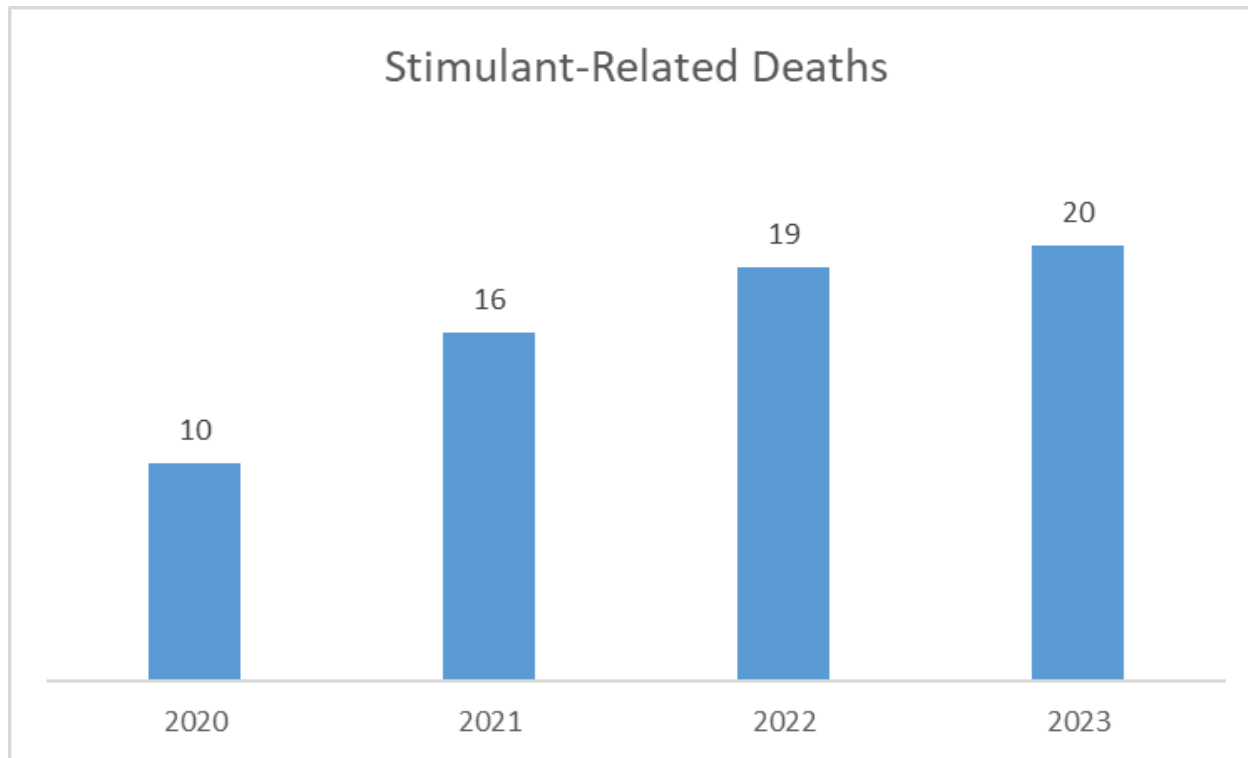


Opioid Deaths



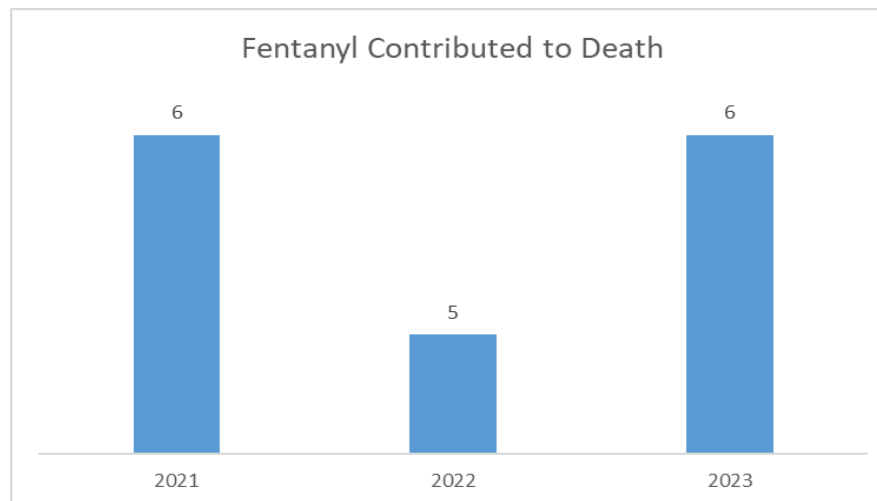
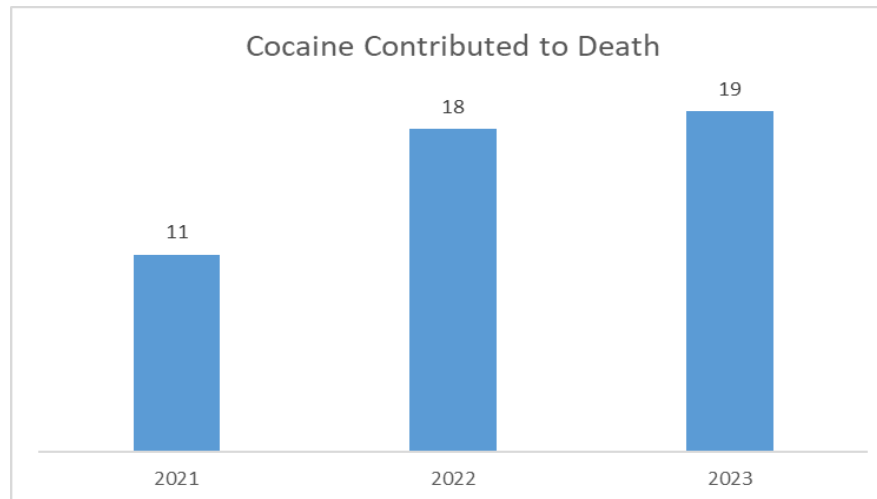
- Cases where at least 1 opioid contributed to death
- Some opioid deaths also involved stimulants
- 2023 cases are ongoing

Stimulant Deaths



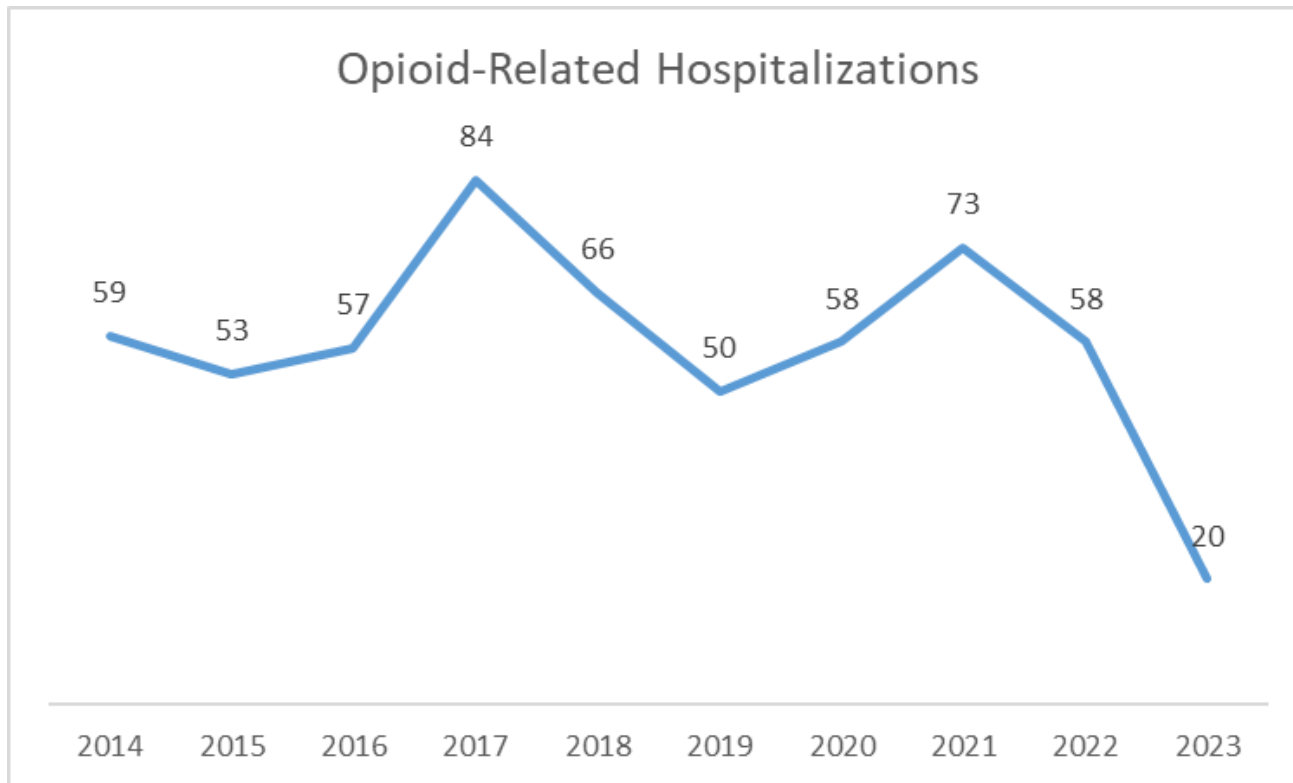
- National Stimulant-related death reporting started after opioid reporting
- Cases where at least 1 stimulant contributed to death
- Some stimulant deaths also involved opioids
- 2023 cases are ongoing

Cocaine and Fentanyl



Note: Cocaine and Fentanyl contributed to the same death 5 times in 2021 and <5 times in 2022 and 2023 (so far)

Hospital Admissions



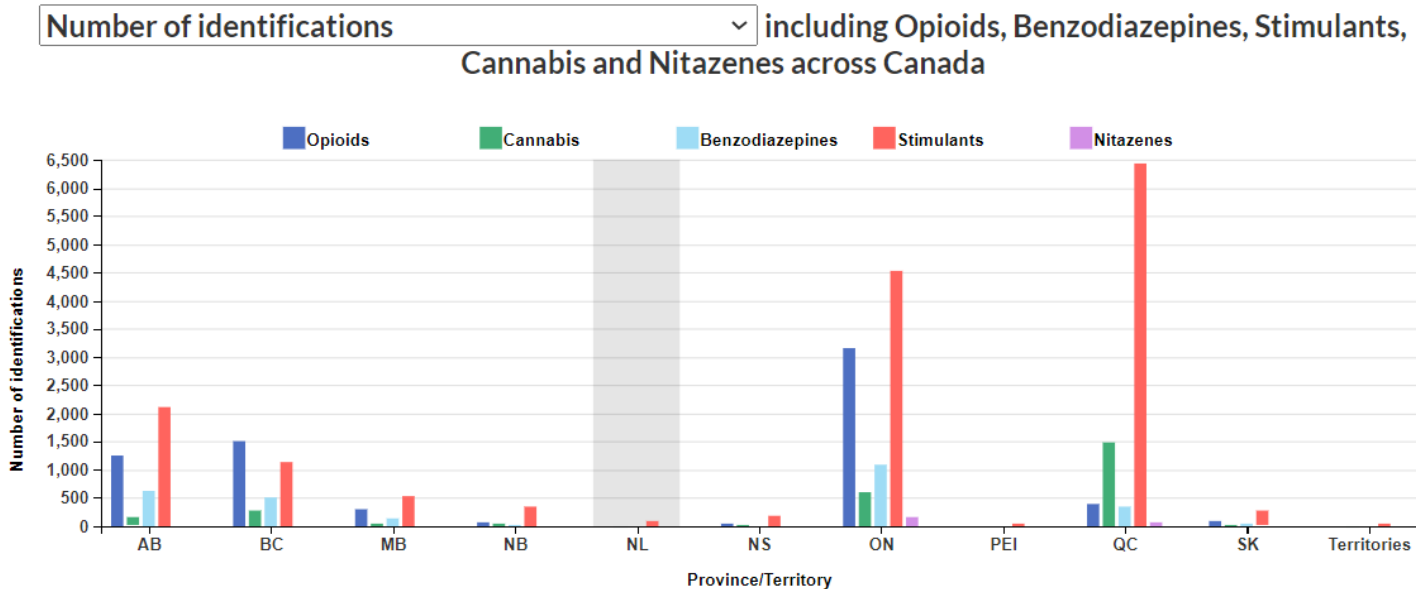
- No strong pattern identified in recent years
- 2023 count will change once all cases are reported in the next calendar year
- ***Stimulant Hospitalizations will be reported moving forward***
- ***Currently unable to report on Emergency Data (does not use ICD codes or report to National Ambulatory Care Reporting System [NACRS])***

Other Drug Toxicity Updates

- Ethanol is often detected in toxicology reports and contribute to a small number of deaths each year in polydrug and acute ethanol toxicity cases
 - Annual acute ETOH tox deaths have been <10 since 2021
 - Deaths due to chronic ETOH misuse have been higher than poisoning deaths (~10) per year since 2021
- Benzodiazepines are increasingly seen and contributing to drug tox deaths in NL and across the country

Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Data

Analyzed Drug Report - July to September 2023



- Identify, measure and report on substances seized by authorities nation-wide
- Laboratories in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver
- Link → <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/controlled-substances-precursor-chemicals/drug-analysis-service.html>

Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Data

Summary for Newfoundland and Labrador



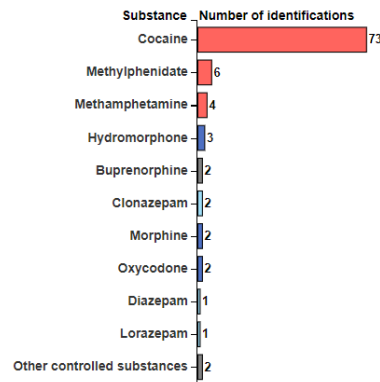
A total of **125** samples (including Cannabis) were submitted for analysis during that period which represents a **34% decrease** over the same period last year.

Drug Categories

■ Opioids ■ Cannabis ■ Benzodiazepines ■ Stimulants ■ Nitazenes ■ Other drug categories

Most Frequently Identified Controlled Substances

[View Table](#)



Newly Identified Substances

Nothing to report

- I get monthly raw data which will feed into OCME annual stats report which will soon be posted here → <https://www.gov.nl.ca/jps/> (under publications)

Key Messages

- Each year opioids contribute more than stimulants to deaths in NL (males; 30-40)
- Cocaine continues to contribute to deaths at higher rates than fentanyl in NL
- All drug tox deaths will surpass historical data in 2023 (including fentanyl, cocaine, and benzodiazepines)

Goals

- Increased accuracy and reporting capacity at the OCME through a new Analyst, new Information Scientist, and current Public Health Officer (in tandem with new DBMS)
- Working with national colleagues to harmonize death investigation processes across the country
- Continue to work with stakeholders to reduce substance-related harms in NL

R Training Materials

- Please use this link to access free R Training materials from the Public Health Agency of Canada's Training and Development Unit (TDU)

<https://github.com/hc-sc/tdu-intror>

- Under Creative Commons, you can use this to develop your own training materials, but please use the affiliation below to source the material and give credit to the TDU or PHAC!
- Affiliation Example → *“This presentation was created by the Public Health Agency of Canada's Training and Development Unit and was adapted for delivery in “your region” by “this person” on “this date”. The following changes were made to the original content:...”*