

Island Health Performance Measures

Toxic Drug Deaths



Year to Date Performance	50.7	Performance Assessment	 Red
Island Health Target	Less than or equal to 7.8	Performance is significantly outside acceptable range; take action and monitor progress.	

What do we measure and why?

On April 14, 2016, the Provincial Health Officer of BC declared an emergency due to the sustained increase in toxic drug deaths, driven in part by the increasing presence of potent opioid analogues such as fentanyl.

Toxic Drug Deaths reports the number of deaths classified by the Coroner's Office as accidental or undetermined (confirmed and under investigation) where cause of death indicates apparent illicit drug overdose, as a rate per 100,000 population. "Illicit drugs" include street drugs, medications not prescribed to the deceased, combinations of the two, and/or cases where the origin of drug is not known.

What is the target?

Island Health's target is 7.8 or fewer per 100,000. This target is based on a decrease from the average annual rate for BC in 2014, when rates began to increase due to the increased presence of fentanyl in the drug supply.

Lower rates are better.

How are we doing?

As of September 2023, Island Health is not meeting the target. The monthly counts of deaths due to illicit drug toxicity in 2023 have again reached record highs.

Between January and September 2023, 38 Island Health residents died due to toxic drug supply each month (on average). Deaths due to Illicit drug toxicity have risen dramatically across the province since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What actions are we taking?

Continued strategies include expansion of inhalation services as well as other services that support safer substance use, including expanded outreach in key communities, increased access to drug checking services, and improving access to treatment modalities across the substance use continuum. Education and outreach activities also continue with a focus on those most at risk, including youth as well as men who use alone.

The engagement of people with lived and living experience of substance use is an on-going priority and will help to inform how we deliver targeted services to those most at risk of death or injury due to the unregulated drug crisis.