

# Results of the Survey on Opioid Awareness, November 2017

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Data from the 2017 Survey on Opioid Awareness are now available. The survey collection was conducted in November and December 2017 and results are being released today, five weeks after the completion of data collection. The information collected by the survey will provide a better understanding of Canadians' knowledge of the opioid issue and risks, and their willingness to act.

Most Canadians aged 18 years and older said they have some level of awareness about the opioid issue in Canada and would call 9-1-1 if they were witnessing a suspected overdose. Over one-quarter (28%) reported that they would know the signs of an overdose, while 7% said they would know how to both obtain and administer naloxone.

In terms of use, 29% of Canadians aged 18 years and older reported using some form of opioids in the past five years, and of these, more than one-quarter reported that they have leftover opioids stored in the home. The most common reason given for keeping opioids in their home was for their own future use (75%).

Opioids are medications that relieve pain. When used properly they can help, but problematic use can cause dependence, overdose and death. Some of the most common opioids are fentanyl, OxyContin, morphine and codeine. Opioids are also available illegally in Canada. Naloxone is a life-saving medication that can stop or reverse an opioid overdose, however, the results are temporary and naloxone does not replace the need for urgent care.

According to the latest estimates produced by the Public Health Agency of Canada, 2,861 apparent opioid-related deaths occurred in Canada in 2016 and at least 1,460 occurred from January to June 2017. Measures to prevent, treat, reduce harm and address the production, supply and distribution of illegal opioids have been a top priority for all levels of government.

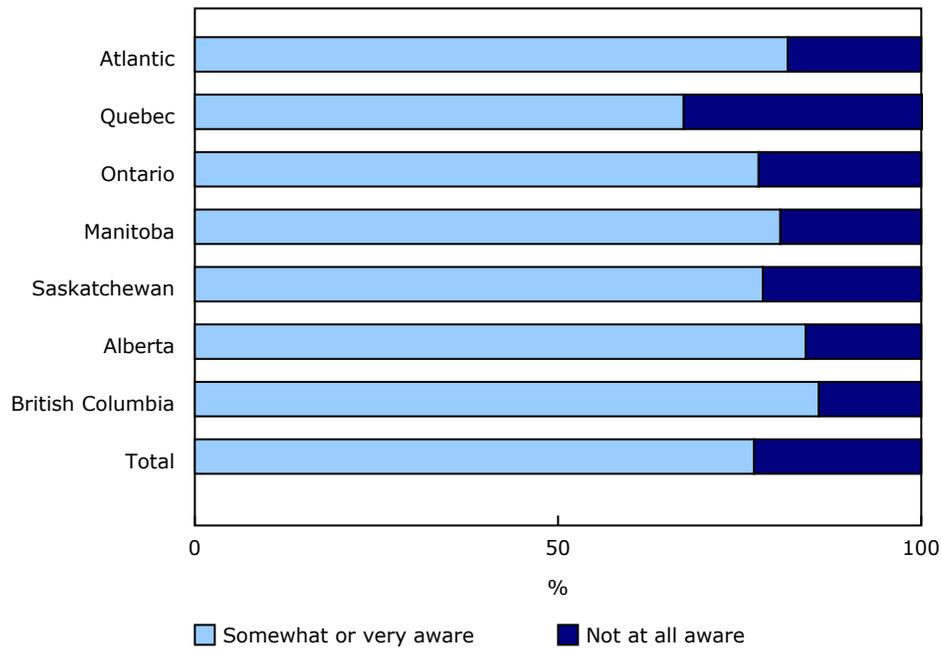
## **Awareness of the opioid issue, by province**

Just over three-quarters (77%) of Canadians, aged 18 years and older, reported being either 'very' or 'somewhat' aware of the opioid issue, but there are provincial variations. The highest level of awareness was in British Columbia (86%) while the lowest was in Quebec (67%), where one-third (33%) of respondents reported being 'not at all aware' of the opioid issue in Canada. The majority of Canadians reported learning about the issue through the media, followed by friends or family, and public awareness campaigns.

Just over 7 in 10 (71%) Canadians reported being 'very aware' that drugs obtained illegally have the potential to contain fentanyl. At the provincial level, awareness of this risk was highest in the Western provinces, particularly in British Columbia, where the largest number of apparent opioid-related deaths associated with illegal fentanyl have been recorded to date.



**Chart 1**  
**Awareness of the opioid issue in Canada, by region**

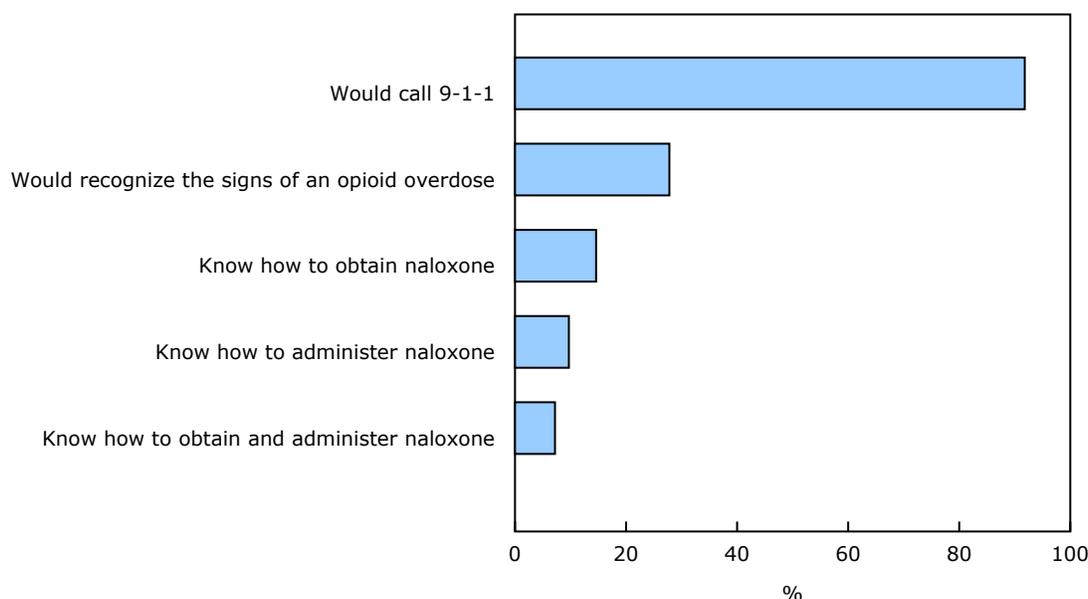


Source(s): Survey on Opioid Awareness (5253).

### Willingness and ability of Canadians to assist in the event of an opioid overdose

Most Canadians aged 18 years and older said they have some level of awareness about the opioid issue in Canada and would call 9-1-1 if they were witnessing a suspected overdose. Over one-quarter (28%) reported that they would know the signs of an overdose, while 7% said they would know how to both obtain and administer naloxone.

**Chart 2**  
**Willingness and ability of Canadians to assist in the event of an opioid overdose**



Source(s): Survey on Opioid Awareness (5253).

### Use in the past five years and storage in the home

In terms of use, 29% of Canadians aged 18 years and older reported using some form of opioids in the past five years, and of these, more than one-quarter reported that they have leftover opioids stored in the home. The most common reason given for keeping opioids in their home was for their own future use (75%).

Respondents were also asked if they would, hypothetically, share their opioids in three situations: to relieve the pain of a family member or friend, to help family members or friends cope with stress or other problems, or for non-medicinal use. While the vast majority reported no to all three questions, 12% of Canadians agreed that they would share their opioids to relieve the pain of a family member or friend.

### Awareness of problematic use of opioids

Close to 8 in 10 (79%) Canadians aged 18 years and older reported being 'very aware' that problematic use of opioids can lead to overdose or death. Three-quarters (75%) reported being 'very aware' of the risks of mixing opioids with alcohol, while 72% were 'very aware' of the risks of mixing them with 'other medications.'

The rate of hospitalization due to opioid poisoning in Canada has increased by more than 50% between 2007-2008 and 2016-2017, according to a recent report released by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. According to a previous study released in 2016, a significant portion of opioid poisonings were also diagnosed with a "co-occurring" poisoning. The most common form of co-occurrence resulted from mixing opioids with benzodiazepines (depressants) (19%), followed by acetaminophen (pain relievers) (14%), cocaine (6%), and alcohol (6%).

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## Stigma related to opioid use

While 36% of Canadians aged 18 years and older reported that they would not want family or friends to know if they were using opioids without a prescription, 14% of those using opioids with a prescription agreed that they would not want their family and friends to know.

People who reported that they were very aware of the opioid issue in Canada — compared with those who reported that they were unaware of the opioid issue — were more likely to agree that there could be a risk of dependency associated with opioid use (82% versus 60%) and more likely to agree that if they had a dependency, they would feel comfortable seeking help or treatment (83% versus 70%).

### Note to readers

Statistics Canada collaborated with partners within Health Canada, Public Safety Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, to develop this new survey entitled the Survey on Opioid Awareness.

This survey falls under the new 'Rapid Stats' program being offered in the Special Surveys Division, within Statistics Canada, to rapidly respond to pressing data needs.

The main objective of the Survey on Opioid Awareness is to better understand the current level of knowledge of the general Canadian population regarding opioids.

The data were collected from every province in November and December 2017.

The target population is the civilian, non-institutionalized population 18 years of age or older in Canada's 10 provinces.

For the purposes of this survey:

**Benzodiazepines** are a class of sedative–hypnotic mainly used to relieve anxiety and assist with sleep problems.

**Opioids** are medications that relieve pain. Opioid medications come in many forms, including tablets, capsules, syrups, solutions, nasal sprays, skin patches and suppositories. The strength of the opioid in these medications varies greatly, and most are available in Canada by prescription only. However, some products containing very low doses of the opioid codeine, combined with at least two other medicinal ingredients, can be purchased directly from a pharmacist.

These data complement the December 2017 [release](#) by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Counts are based on both completed and ongoing coroner and medical examiner investigations, and as such are subject to change.

For more information about opioids, visit the Government of Canada [website](#).

These data also complement recent releases by the [Canadian Institute for Health Information](#).

### Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5253](#).

The infographic "[Opioid awareness in Canada](#)," which is part of *Statistics Canada — Infographics (11-627-M)*, is now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).