



Current Local Evidence to Inform Ottawa's Overdose Prevention and Response Strategy

All areas of Ottawa are affected by drug overdose and opioid-related harms, but most people who visit the Emergency Department (ED) due to opioid overdose live in the downtown area. Most opioid-related deaths occur there as well.

Overdose related ED visits and call data:

- The number of confirmed opioid overdose-related emergency department (ED) visits in Ottawa increased rapidly in 2020 and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, there were 1,337 opioid overdose-related ED visits, a nearly three-fold increase from 2019 (448).ⁱ In 2024, there were 934 opioid overdose-related ED visits with ED visits declining since February (data from November to December are preliminary).ⁱⁱ
 - The highest number of opioid overdose-related ED visits occurred in the third quarter (July-September) of 2023.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The Ottawa Neighbourhood Study (ONS) neighbourhoods with the highest yearly average rates of confirmed drug overdose ED visits in Ottawa by neighbourhood of patient, between 2019 and 2023, were Lowertown West (1630.7 per 100,000), Sandy Hill (303.6 per 100,000), West Centretown (223.4 per 100,000), and Lowertown East (169.8 per 100,000).^{iv}
- In 2024, Ottawa Police Services responded to 1,473 overdose related calls, 17% lower than 2023. In 2024, the ONS neighbourhoods with the highest number of overdose related calls responded to by the Ottawa Police Services were Lowertown (372), ByWard Market (339), Centretown (252), Sandy Hill – Ottawa East (96) and West Centretown (88).^v

** It is important to remember that the health burden of overdose based on ED visits and 911 calls for service are an underestimate: many people who experience a non-fatal overdose do not seek medical treatment.*

Opioid related death data:

- The number of confirmed opioid-related deaths among Ottawa residents increased rapidly in early 2020 and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, there were 207 confirmed opioid-related deaths, a nearly three-fold increase from 2019 (65).^{vi}
 - The highest number of opioid overdose deaths occurred in the first quarter (January-March) of 2023.^{vii}
- The highest yearly average rates of suspected drug overdose deaths in Ottawa by ONS neighbourhood of incident, between 2019 and 2023, occurred in the ByWard Market (216.2 per 100,000), Lowertown East (113.3 per 100,000), Wateridge Village (70.8 per 100,000) and West Centretown (58.7 per 100,000).^{viii}
- 2023 saw the highest number (207) of opioid-related deaths among Ottawa residents in recent years.^{ix}
 - Between January and September 2024, there were at least 123 opioid-related deaths, which is comparable to the number of deaths seen in the same period of 2022 (129) and lower than 2023 (159). Data for Q4 2024 is not yet available.
- There has been a steady rise in opioid and stimulant toxicity death in Ottawa from 2019 to 2023. In Ottawa, up to 80% of opioid deaths involve a stimulant.^x

- There has also been a shift in the mode of use from injection to inhalation. There is a trend of increased deaths connected to inhalation use with a peak in Q1 2023 where 69% of deaths had evidence of inhalation as a mode of use.^{xi}
- The majority of opioid related deaths are accidental and occur among males and those aged 25-to 44-year-olds.^{xii}
- In terms of other substances directly contributing to accidental opioid deaths among Ottawa residents. In 2023,
 - 8% of accidental opioid-related deaths in Ottawa had alcohol as contributing factor, a decrease from 2022 (18%)
 - 22% of deaths had methamphetamine as a contributing factor which was lower than the past few years.
 - 44% of deaths had cocaine as a contributing factor, a decrease from a high of 66% in 2018.
 - Over a quarter (27%) of deaths had benzodiazepines as a direct contributing cause.^{xiii}
- The majority of those who die of an accidental opioid overdose were unemployed – 54% in 2023.^{xiv}
- In terms of the living arrangements, the majority of Ottawa residents who die by accidental opioid overdose live in private dwellings (50% in 2023), however that number has decreased over time from a high of 70% in 2019 to a low of 48% in 2022.
 - In 2023, 8% of deaths were among people living in collective dwellings and 19% were experiencing homelessness at the time they died.^{xv}
- Social isolation is a risk factor for people experiencing harm because of the toxic drug crisis. In 2023, only 21% of accidental opioid related deaths occurred where it was known that someone was available to intervene.^{xvi}
 - Accidental opioid related deaths could be prevented by ensuring that people have a safe space to connect with others and receive access to basic needs.

Supervised consumption and treatment site services:

From January 2021 to September 2024, the four Consumption and Treatment Services in Ottawa have had close to 350,000 visits with more than 130,000 visits from January 2023 to September 2024.

- The majority of people visiting the CTS sites are men and people between the ages of 30 and 39 years.
- From January 2021 to September 2024 there have been 5,041 overdose interventions at CTS sites, none of which were fatal. 2,130 interventions occurred between January 2023 and September 2024.
 - CTS staff have been increasingly responding to overdoses occurring outdoors, nearby their sites, with a total of 1,169 outdoor overdose responses from January to September, 2024.
- The most frequently used substances at the CTS between January 2021 and September 2024 were Fentanyl followed by Dilaudid/Hydromorphone and Methamphetamine. Data shows that from January 2023 onward fentanyl and dilaudid/hydromorphone continue to be the top 2 substances consumed.
- From January 2021 to September 2024, there were close to 190,000 referrals made to additional onsite and offsite services. Additional available services include mental health, substance use health, social services and peer support.^{xvii}

Mental Health, Addictions, and Substance Use Health System Navigation:

- The top reason for reaching out to system navigators is for mental health support at 67% followed by substance use health support at 32%.^{xviii}
- 38% of people reaching out for support had two or more presenting problems.^{xix}
- 57% of Ottawa residents reaching out to 1Call1Click.ca are presenting with moderate or moderate to severe needs.^{xx}
- 70% of clients are referred to services inside Ottawa, however 21% are referred to services outside of Ottawa with bed-based treatment for substance use support being the number one reason for referral outside of Ottawa at 67%.^{xxi}
- Support within housing – mental health has the longest wait times by a significant amount with people waiting over 1300 days in total. The next longest wait time is for assertive community treatment teams (ACTT) at close to 400 days in total.^{xxii}

2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey -Ottawa results:

- Past year use of non-medical opioids doubled from 10% in 2021 to 20% in 2023, with grade 7-8 students just as likely to report using them as high school students.^{xxiii}
- Past year use of alcohol (33%), cannabis (15%), and vapes (10%) among grade 7-12 students was similar to 2021, however use of cough/cold medicine significantly increased (9% vs. 3%*)^{xxiv}
- While alcohol and cannabis use were significantly higher among students in grade 9-12 compared to grade 7-8, use of vapes was similar in both groups (*5%).^{xxv}
- The use of cough/cold medicines was higher among students in grade 7-8 compared grade 9-12 students (14%* vs 7%).^{xxvi}
- In Ottawa, 41% of grade 7-12 students agree that it's a sign of weakness to use alcohol or drugs to the point that it negatively affects their family relationships, friendships, sleep, grades, or health, with males significantly more likely to agree compared to females (51% vs 30%).^{xxvii}
- 37% of grade 7-12 students in Ottawa reported their mental health as 'fair' or 'poor'. This is an improvement from 2021 (44%), however remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic (21% in 2019).^{xxviii}
 - Self-reported mental health was significantly worse among female students compared to males with 56% reporting "fair" or "poor" mental health compared to 20%, respectively.
 - Socioeconomically (SE) disadvantaged students self-reported their mental health as 'fair' or 'poor' at a significantly higher percentage than SE advantaged students in both 2019 (31% vs 16%) and 2021 (66% vs 35%). However, there is no longer a significant difference between socioeconomic (SE) groups in the 2023 results, meaning that the disparity between SE groups has narrowed.
- Nearly a fifth (18%) of grade 7-12 students in Ottawa reported thoughts about suicide in the past 12 months with females significantly more likely to report than males (26% vs 9%*)^{xxix}
 - 5%* of grade 7-12 students in Ottawa report attempting suicide in the past 12 months.

* Indicates that data should be interpreted with caution due to moderate sampling variability (coefficient of variation (CV) between 16.5 and 33.3).

Ottawa Point in Time (PiT) Count- Peoples experiences with homelessness:

“The City of Ottawa, in collaboration with the Indigenous Sector and a core team of seven community partners, coordinated and implemented the 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count. The purpose of the PiT Count is to gather important information to deepen the understanding of those experiencing homelessness in our city. This information will inform the development and implementation of services, programs and policies to reflect the needs of our community.”^{xxx}

- In the 2021 PiT survey, people were asked “What would you need support with to help you through your housing journey” and 40% stated “mental health” while 30% stated “addiction or substance use”, with 35% saying ‘none of the above’. The 2024 PiT survey provided more response options for this question allowing for a better understanding of what people identify as the supports they need. In the 2024 survey the top responses were, “Financial supports” (51%), “Supportive housing” (49%), “Food security (46%) and “Mental health support” (33%).^{xxxi}
- When asked about health challenges in the 2024 survey 42% of respondents stated they had a mental health issue and 37% stated they had a substance use issue, with 57% stating they had one or more health condition(s).^{xxxii}
- In 2024, respondents cited not enough income (30%), experienced discrimination (16%), relocation (15%), unfit/unsafe housing (12%), substance use (12%) and conflict with spouse/partner (11%) tied with mental health (11%) as the top five reasons for what happened that caused them to lose their housing most recently.^{xxxiii}
- In the 2024 survey a new question was asked about healthcare visits. “Within the last 12 months, 44 per cent of those surveyed reported they had a hospital emergency department visit, of those 25 per cent had more than five visits, and 63 per cent of respondents reported having a hospital stay in the last year. When it comes to primary care visits, 33 per cent reported they were able to visit their primary care health professional, and of those 40 per cent had five or more visits within the last year.”^{xxxiv}

ⁱ Ottawa Public Health. Ottawa’s Overdose Overview Tool Dashboard. Taken from the confirmed opioid overdose ED visits by month in Ottawa, 2020-2024 graph. Data source: NACRS, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care 2020-2024. Ottawa, ON. Last updated March 2025. [Stopoverdoseottawa.ca](https://stopoverdoseottawa.ca)

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Ottawa Public Health. Ottawa’s Overdose Overview Tool Dashboard. Taken from the rate of confirmed drug overdose ED visits by ONS neighbourhood of patient, 2019-2023 map. Data source: NACRS, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care 2019-2023. Ottawa, ON. Last updated March 2025. [Stopoverdoseottawa.ca](https://stopoverdoseottawa.ca)

^v Ottawa Police Services. Overdose Calls for Service dashboard – Reporting period 2018-2024. Retrieved on February 27, 2025. <https://data.ottawapolice.ca/pages/overdose>

^{vi} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from the Opioid related deaths among Ottawa residents by quarter graph. Data source: Opioid Investigative Aid Report (OCCO), 2024. Ottawa, ON. Last updated December 2024. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{vii} Ibid

^{viii} Ottawa Public Health. Ottawa’s Overdose Overview Tool Dashboard. Taken from the rate of confirmed opioid toxicity deaths in Ottawa by ONS neighbourhood of incident, 2019-2023 map. Data source: OCCO, 2024. Ottawa, ON. Last updated March 2025. [Stopoverdoseottawa.ca](https://stopoverdoseottawa.ca)

^{ix} Ottawa Public Health. Ottawa's Overdose Overview Tool Dashboard. Taken from the confirmed opioid-related deaths among Ottawa residents by quarter, 2018-2024 graph. Data source: OCCO, 2025. Ottawa, ON. Last updated March 2025. [Stopoverdoseottawa.ca](https://stopoverdoseottawa.ca)

^x Office of the Chief Coroner. Opioid and Stimulant Toxicity Deaths in Ottawa, 2018 to 2024 (Q1). CME webinar series with the University of Ottawa and Ottawa Public Health. Ottawa's Updated Overdose Prevention and Response Strategy, Suicide Prevention and Post Suicide Response. Data effective September 19, 2024.

^{xi} Office of the Chief Coroner. Opioid Toxicity Deaths in Ottawa: Presumed modes of use, 2018 to 2024 (Q1). CME webinar series with the University of Ottawa and Ottawa Public Health. Ottawa's Updated Overdose Prevention and Response Strategy, Suicide Prevention and Post Suicide Response. Data effective September 19, 2024.

^{xii} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from the Accidental opioid-related deaths in Ottawa graphs. Data source: OCCO, 2024. Ottawa, ON. Last updated December 2024. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{xiii} Ibid

^{xiv} Ibid

^{xv} Ibid

^{xvi} Ibid

^{xvii} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from the Additional information on supervised consumption and treatment services in Ottawa: Overdose and emergency intervention graph. Data Source: Monthly Health Canada Reports from Ottawa Public Health, Somerset West Community Health Centre, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre and Ottawa Inner City Health. Ottawa, ON. Last updated March 2025. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{xviii} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from Reasons for reaching out to MH, SUH and BA system navigator cards. Data Sources: 1Call1Click.ca, April 2022 to September 2024; AccessMHA, April 2022 to September 2024; ConnexOntario, January 2018 to September 2024. Last updated December 2024. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{xix} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from What percent of Ottawa residents reaching out for supports had two or more presenting problems cards. Data Sources: AccessMHA, April 2022 to September 2024; ConnexOntario, January 2018 to September 2024. Last updated December 2024. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{xx} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from Clients level need (clinical acuity) graph. Data Sources: 1Call1Click.ca, January 2018 to September 2024. Last updated December 2024. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{xxi} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from the Referrals and wait times for services section. Data Sources: ConnexOntario, January 2018 to September 2024. Last updated December 2024. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{xxii} Ibid

^{xxiii} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from the Self Reported Substance Use by Youth graph. Data Source: 2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey by CAMH, Ottawa oversample. Ottawa, ON. Last Updated December 2024. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{xxiv} Ibid

^{xxv} Ibid

^{xxvi} Ibid

^{xxvii} Ottawa Public Health. Ottawa Results from the 2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey: Key findings relating to Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health. Data Source: 2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey by CAMH, Ottawa oversample. Ottawa, ON. December 2024.

^{xxviii} Ottawa Public Health. Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard. Taken from the Self Reported Mental Health by Youth graph. Data Source: 2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey by CAMH, Ottawa oversample. Ottawa, ON. Last Updated December 2024. ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard

^{xxix} Ottawa Public Health. Ottawa Results from the 2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey: Key findings relating to Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health. Data Source: 2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey by CAMH, Ottawa oversample. Ottawa, ON. December 2024.

^{xxx} City of Ottawa. Executive Summary 2024 Ottawa Point-In-Time Count. Ottawa, ON.
https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/default/files/2024PiTReport_EN.pdf

^{xxxi} City of Ottawa. Point in Time Count Dashboard. Ottawa, ON. Retrieved on February 27, 2025 from
<https://ottawa.ca/en/family-and-social-services/housing-and-homelessness/plans-facts-and-data/point-time-count/point-time-count-dashboard#section-8bf6cda7-b666-4b1d-8f5d-a2bc2766f10f>

^{xxxii} Ibid

^{xxxiii} Ibid

^{xxxiv} City of Ottawa. Executive Summary 2024 Ottawa Point-In-Time Count. Ottawa, ON.
https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/default/files/2024PiTReport_EN.pdf