

# Keeping Up with the Evidence: Issue 10

## Background

Highlights and references of recent publications related to HIV and other STBBIs, harm reduction, and other related work.

## A review of the Canadian response to the opioid crisis.

Contrary to our usual overview of multiple articles, this issue of Keeping Up with the Evidence focuses on a single recent publication discussing the Canadian response to the opioid crisis through the lens of the four-pillar approach guiding the Canadian Drug and Substance Strategy (CDSS).

## Lessons learned from the opioid crisis across the pillars of the Canadian drugs and substances strategy (Taha, Maloney-Hall, & Buxton, 2019)

**Summary:** The authors of this article conducted a review of the literature relevant to the opioid crisis in the Canadian context and which address one of the four pillars of the CDSS: prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement. The goal was to identify lessons learned from Canadian response since 2013. Their search and exclusion criteria retained 65 articles which were considered within the review. The review breaks down lessons learned across all four pillars.

**Prevention:** The section on prevention discusses opioid-prescribing practices as well as some of the unintended consequences of reducing opioid prescriptions for individuals who then turned to illicitly procured substances in order to deal with their addiction. Evidence also points to a need to better education of prescribers, not only on pain management but also on stigma. The discussion is broken down according to medical vs non-medical use of opioids.

**Treatment:** Lessons learned include that there is a great need of improving accessibility, reducing barriers to treatment, and providing culturally appropriate treatment which also address social determinants of health. Further education is needed to help physicians managing people who live with opioid use disorder and improve their chances of retaining them in treatment such as opioid agonist therapy (OAT).

**Harm Reduction:** the article highlights the wealth of evidence supporting harm reduction practices, including supervised consumption sites. However, lessons learned include that stigmatizing attitudes and language towards addiction and harm reduction remain an issue, in particular in neighbourhoods where SCS are established.

**Enforcement:** The main lesson learned in this regard is that while the CDSS includes focusing on law enforcement towards production and distribution of illicit substances (or unlawful distribution of controlled substances), arresting individuals and incarceration do not prevent or address drug use at the individual levels as is ineffective in ending the opioid crisis.

**Implications:** This article provides useful language around the evidence on the Canadian response to the opioid crisis. Members could refer to it when formulating proposals, especially considering that their projects should take into consideration the CDSS and its four-pillar approach.

**Link:** <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-019-0220-7>



## Reference:

Taha, S., Maloney-Hall, B., & Buxton, J. (2019). Lessons learned from the opioid crisis across the pillars of the Canadian drugs and substances strategy. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 14(1), 32. doi:10.1186/s13011-019-0220-7