

August 31 is International Overdose Awareness Day

by David Tilson

There has been much discussion about the opioid crisis in Canada with the growing number of overdoses and deaths caused by opioids. According to Health Canada, the number of prescription drugs stolen from pharmacies each year has dramatically increased, the majority of which were highly addictive opioid painkillers. A total of 1.8 million doses of controlled drugs were reported missing to Health Canada in the first nine months of 2017, a 64 per cent increase from 2012, while 4,000 Canadians died from opioid overdoses last year. These frightening statistics underscore that Canada is in a national public health crisis which needs to be addressed, as well as the increased need for overdose awareness.

International Overdose Awareness Day is an annual, global event which takes place on August 31st of each year. Its aim is to raise awareness of overdose and to help reduce the stigma of a drug-related death, while also remembering those who've been lost due to an overdose and understanding that overdose deaths are preventable. It began in 2001 by Sally J. Flynn at The Salvation Army in St. Kilda, Melbourne, and has significantly grown since that time.

On July 27, 2018, B.C. Emergency Health Services said that paramedics responded to 130 suspected overdose calls. This is deeply concerning and reminds all of us as Canadians that we need to do more. We, the Conservative Official Opposition, take drug addiction very seriously and recognize that Canada is currently in the middle of an unprecedented opioid epidemic. We also recognize the harm caused by it. These drugs can tear families apart, lead to criminal behaviour, and destroy lives. The loss of a loved one due to an overdose-related death brings unimaginable pain to their family, friends, and represents a tragic loss for their communities. The opioid crisis also reminds us that it's impacting Canadians across all ages, urban and rural communities, and socio-economic groups. We're seeing young professionals, blue collar workers, and teenagers dying at alarming rates from experimenting with recreational drugs.

There needs to be more public education to inform young people about the harms of prescription medication. We, the Conservative Official Opposition, want to prevent people from becoming addicted and we support the treatment of those battling addiction. It is unfortunate that the current Liberal government is providing \$800 million to legalize marijuana while committing less than half of that to combat opioids.

International Overdose Awareness Day is an opportunity for all Canadians to join the conversation about the opioid crisis in our country and commit to working together to reduce the number of overdose-related deaths in Canada to support the treatment of those in need. A shared commitment to prevention and treatment can help to save lives.

If you or someone you know is struggling with problematic substance abuse, help is available. Please visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-abuse/get-help/get-help-with-drug-abuse.html> for a listing of national and provincial help resources.