

Risk mitigation opioid prescribing reduced death rates by two-thirds

in the week following prescription, in people with opioid use disorder compared to peers who did not receive a prescription, from Mar 2020 to Aug 2021 in B.C.

Risk Mitigation Guidance was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide support for prescribing select medications to people at risk of toxic drug poisoning (overdose) as an **alternative to the unregulated drug supply**.

Researchers evaluated the impact of prescribing opioids or stimulants on death and acute care use within the week following prescription. This is the **first large-scale evaluation** of prescribing alternatives to the toxic drug supply in the world.

A total of **5,882 people** diagnosed with **opioid or stimulant use disorder** who received a prescription opioid or stimulant were matched to peers who did not receive a prescription.

Key Findings

61%↓

lower rate of death from any cause the week after at least one day of opioid prescription, and a **55% lower rate of death from overdose**.



The **effect increased with number of prescription days**; people who received four or more days of opioid prescription had a 91% lower rate of death from any cause, and 89% lower rate of death from overdose.



Opioid prescription was not associated with acute care use. **People prescribed stimulants used less acute care** the following week. The effect of stimulant prescription on risk of death was unclear.

Looking Forward

Overdose deaths are caused by an increasingly toxic, unregulated drug supply contaminated with fentanyl, benzodiazepines & other substances. These deaths are preventable & prescribed alternatives are one promising tool. **Fewer than one in ten people** with opioid use disorder had access to prescribed alternatives during this period.