

# KEY MESSAGES: Mental health and substance use impacts of COVID-19

## PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS



### SUBSTANCE USE AND RELATED HARMS ARE LIKELY INCREASING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Challenges related to sudden substance withdrawals and opioid overdoses are likely increasing due to the pandemic, and treatment and supports (including access to services) are being impacted.

The pandemic is resulting in shifts in access to legal and illegal substances.



### THERE IS A GAP IN KNOWLEDGE WITH RESPECT TO ETHICAL DECISION MAKING FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS DURING MEDICAL DISRUPTIONS

People who use drugs (PWUD) have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic because of their social, psychological, and biological vulnerability. Public health mandated restrictions and resulting emergency changes to health and human services have impacted PWUD.



### SAFE SUPPLY MODELS FACE MANY BARRIERS AND SHOULD BE TAILORED TO THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

There is a disconnect between academic literature and what PWUD believe to be important.

Safe supply models need to be tailored to the needs of PWUD, local capacities, and the political or social landscapes of the geographic region.



### TREATMENT FOR SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES DIFFERS IN THE CONTEXT OF MAJOR SOCIAL DISRUPTIONS

Disrupting opioid substitution therapy can cause severe consequences for PWUD such as relapse, withdrawal and restart of risky injection behaviours.

Trauma-informed care is important during and after the pandemic. Lockdowns and stay-at-home measures may exacerbate mental health and substance use issues.

Within the population of PWUD, women, Indigenous Peoples, visible minorities, and people experiencing homelessness or mental illness may be at particular risk of harm.

Learn more at <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52001.html>