

# DIVERSION OF PHARMACEUTICAL OPIOIDS

## What is diversion?

Diversion or non-medical use of prescription pharmaceutical opioids (POs) has been linked to health risks.

However, little is known about the effects of using diverted POs among people who use unregulated drugs (PWUD) amidst the toxic drug crisis, which is driven by the contamination of the unregulated drug supply through fentanyl.

**VIDUS and ACCESS researchers examined the effect of using diverted POs on fentanyl exposure among PWUD in Vancouver.**



## HOW

They analysed self-reported data and urine drug tests from 1150 PWUD participants between 2016 and 2018.

PWUD who used diverted POs had **30% lower odds of testing positive for fentanyl.**

## KEY TAKE-WAYS

Diverted POs may have some benefit of decreasing the risk of fentanyl exposure among PWUD in the context of a highly toxic unregulated drug supply.

These findings support calls for exploring a regulated supply of pharmaceutical-grade opioids as alternatives to unregulated opioids to address the toxic drug crisis.

# MORE CONTEXT AND FINDINGS...

## BACKGROUND

At the start of the overdose crisis, policy responses focused on reducing opioid overprescribing and diversion.

However, these policies did not account for the needs of people who were already opioid-dependant or people with untreated pain.

A donut chart with a dark blue outer ring and a light blue inner ring, representing 50.2% of the total.

50.2%

**About 1/2** of study participants were exposed to fentanyl.

**People who used diverted POs had higher odds of:**

- higher average scores of pain severity and interference
- higher frequency of injection drug use
- homelessness or incarceration
- an inability to access addiction treatment

**About 1/5** of study participants used diverted POs.

A donut chart with a dark blue outer ring and a light blue inner ring, representing 21% of the total.

21%

**Most commonly used diverted POs:**

- morphine (42%)
- hydromorphone (25%)
- codeine (14%)

The preventive effect of diverted POs against fentanyl exposure was primarily observed among those testing positive for morphine.

VIDUS and ACCESS are ongoing open prospective cohort studies of community-recruited people who use unregulated drugs in Vancouver, Canada.

The harmonized cohorts have contributed to advancing health policy and programming in Vancouver and beyond.

## FIND OUT MORE

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## REFERENCE

Socias, M. E., Grant, C., Hayashi, K., Bardwell, G., Kennedy, M. C., Milloy, M. J., & Kerr, T. (2021). The use of diverted pharmaceutical opioids is associated with reduced risk of fentanyl exposure among people using unregulated drugs in Vancouver, Canada. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 228, 109109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.109109>