



CPSA's Statement on the Opioid Crisis and Safe Prescribing

The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) recognizes that many Albertans suffer with severe daily pain and need medical assistance to allow them to live productive lives with their family, friends and in the workplace. We understand the challenges these Albertans face and encourage physicians to work with their patients to find a sustainable solution.

In recent media articles and social media content, the CPSA's work around opioid prescribing has been criticized, suggesting CPSA is responsible for a large percentage of physicians who treat pain choosing to leave the profession. Such claims are simply not true, in fact the CPSA's ongoing research and information related to opioid use and misuse offers patients and physicians good data and improved trends. That's why the CPSA must correct the misinformation others have recently shared about our work.

Since 2016, CPSA has been supporting all physicians in prescribing opioids responsibly using an educational approach that involves regular prescribing reports, called MD Snapshot – Prescribing, and up-to-date information about best practices in managing pain and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). Responsible prescribing **does not** include abrupt discontinuation or tapering of opioids or abandoning patients who use opioids.

Through TPP Alberta (a provincial partnership that monitors the use of prescription drugs prone to misuse), opioid data has shown that the vast majority of the medical profession is prescribing opioids responsibly and in accordance with best evidence. We have not seen an exodus of physicians who treat pain.

In the very rare instances where our educational efforts have had no impact and physicians are providing unsafe care that place patients at risk, the CPSA will step in and restrict physicians' practices. If we fail to take action in these cases, we would not be upholding our obligation to Albertans. When CPSA does intervene, we always provide a reasonable period of time and assist physicians in transitioning their patients to new care providers to ensure no one is abandoned.

Further data shows that:

- In a survey that was sent to recipients of the MD Snapshot – Prescribing report, 77% of physicians surveyed found CPSA's educational prescribing reports useful.
- Alberta Health data shows that accidental opioid poisoning deaths that involve prescription opioids are down by 50% between 2016 and 2018.
- According to TPP Alberta data:
 - Physicians are prescribing lower amount of opioids in keeping with current best practice (approximately 20% less since 2016; trend has levelled off in 2019).
 - The total number of physicians prescribing opioids remains the same.



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- The total number of patients receiving opioids is slightly less in keeping with current guidelines that suggest considering alternative treatments before starting an opioid (approximately 13% fewer patients received an opioid in 2018 vs. 2016).
- Physicians are treating more patients for opioid use disorder (59% increase since 2016).

CPSA recognizes there's still a lot of work to do around the opioid crisis. Since 2016, we've worked closely with Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services and other partners to address the fentanyl crisis in Alberta. This includes new and innovative treatments using prescription opioids and supporting harm reduction efforts to prevent deaths until society can address the root causes of this crisis, which is much deeper than opioid prescribing. We remain committed to always acting in the best interests of Albertans by being a part of the solution, not the problem.

CPSA recognizes it has an important role in improving care for patients in regards to opioid use and we remain committed to helping both physicians and patients move towards improved health and wellbeing.

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