

Yukon Coroner's Service reports that the tragic loss of lives due to drug overdoses continues to rise in the Yukon. As of August 31, the Yukon has recorded **14** lost lives due to toxic illicit drug use since January 1st of this year. This doubles the numbers seen when we last reported at the end of April. **All of these deaths involved opioids** in various formats of fentanyl and in combination with other illicit drugs and/or alcohol.

The Yukon, like most other Canadian jurisdictions, has suffered greatly under the strain of what has been deemed "the opioid crisis", which found its way to us in the Spring of 2016. Since that time and to date, **47** individuals in the Yukon have lost their lives to the **illicit use of opioids**, 83% of those deaths have involved fentanyl. *(A further 10 individuals have died as the result of non-opioid drug overdoses during that time-period. **The Yukon has lost 57 lives to drug overdoses since Spring 2016**).*

As is well known, we saw a significant increase in opioid overdose deaths in 2020, with a total of 10 deaths, compared to the 4 investigated in 2019. 2021 is already showing a 40% increase over the 2020 total, and the year will continue for another four months.

As these numbers continue to grow so too does the burden of grief and unimaginable losses felt throughout our communities. We have seen, many times now, that no part of our society is unaffected. These deaths are occurring in young people barely out of their teens and to those well into their 70s. Friends, colleagues, family members – all loved contributors to all of our Yukon communities. More and more Yukon families are being left with a devastating reality found in the wake of these lost lives. This is a pain that is now close to so many of us.

Yukon Coroner's Service is mandated to speak for the dead; to give voice to our losses and bring to light messaging that can make a difference. The hope continues that we will all take the time to listen and really hear what these deaths are telling us. May we find the wisdom and compassion to support well thought-out initiatives and to embrace struggling individuals; and together confront this continuing crisis.

Our communities are in pain.

Heather Jones
Chief Coroner for the Yukon

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