

# **PUBLIC SAFETY'S LAW ENFORCEMENT ROUNDTABLE ON DRUGS**



## **CURRENT & EMERGING TRENDS IN ILLCIT DRUG SUPPLY**

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## **BC has a large-scale domestic methamphetamine and fentanyl production problem**

- “Analogue-ing” – discreet modifications made to fentanyl and pre-precursor / precursor chemicals are sufficient to exploit existing drug and chemical regulations. These new substances are not listed in the CDSA or PCR
- Smuggling methods for controlled chemicals, precursors and pre-precursors, as well as commercial-sized laboratory equipment have been effective in circumventing or defeating proper importation processes
- The acquisition, trade and distribution of unregulated chemicals and precursors operates outside traditional drug / substance control systems and is dominated by third-party brokers operating under the auspices of legitimate business
- Concerning level of risk related to diversion of ephedrine, pseudo-ephedrine, and other unregulated chemicals under the PCR for production of methamphetamine



## Methamphetamine

- **Importation - Mexico is a key source of imported methamphetamine**
  - pre-pandemic, Mexican methamphetamine flooded Canada and other international markets; during the pandemic, supply decreased and / or was stockpiled
  - 2020: 575 kg methamphetamine seized inbound to BC at land border crossings
- **Domestic production - BC remains a hub**
  - importation of pre-precursors, precursors and chemicals from China; stockpiles are bolstered continuously
  - domestic diversion of ephedrine obtained from Canadian wholesalers
  - chemical supply companies sell regulated and unregulated chemicals to third party brokers and purchasers, who in turn divert them to criminal organizations or independent producers
  - inter-provincial movement and supply of BC-made methamphetamine to other provinces
- **Exportation from British Columbia to Australia, New Zealand and Japan continues**





>1M empty foil packages of ephedrine



Extracting ephedrine



Ephedrine tablets in totes



Evaporating solvent from extracted ephedrine



## **Methamphetamine: Precursor Control Regulation Working Group**

- E Division RCMP, CACP, Health Canada, and Public Safety Canada are engaged in ongoing meetings to understand, assess the need for and implement further regulatory control on the importation and diversion of ephedrine and precursors
- Concern: the diversion of ephedrine from legitimate channels to the illegal production of methamphetamine:
  - large quantities of ephedrine imported in to Canada  
Canada 7000 kg vs USA 4000 kg in 2017
  - large quantities of imported ephedrine is destined for “research facilities”
  - ephedrine found in clandestine labs was extracted from “therapeutic” products sold at natural health and supplement stores
- Recommendations:
  - prohibition of chemicals used in the illegal production of controlled substances
  - impose limitations on the importation of ephedrine / pseudoephedrine
  - need for additional resources to strengthen inspection capacity for retailers and address diversion of precursor and illegal production of synthetic drugs
  - further coordination between the agencies to identify and tackle diversion





## **Methamphetamine and Fentanyl Ongoing Multi-Agency Collaborations**

- CIROC:
  - National Methamphetamine Strategy
  - E Division Methamphetamine Strategy and Action Plan
- CACP
- CISC and BC-based Methamphetamine and Fentanyl Analytical Working Groups
- BCACP:
  - Standing Committees on Drugs, Organized Crime, Mental Health and Addictions
- Chemical Signature Program (Methamphetamine) (DEA, CBSA)
- E Div CLEAR & Public Safety Canada, Drug Policy Division (re: examining measures to decrease availability of tablet presses and other designated devices)



## Fentanyl

- since 2019, there has been a decline in the number and volume of seizures of imported, finished fentanyl. However, there has been a marked increase, in terms of both volume and number, of fentanyl pre-precursors, precursors and unregulated chemicals used in the synthesis of fentanyl, pointing to domestic production
- increase in the availability of “designer” fentanyls (which have molecular modifications having similar pharmacological profiles, such as isotonitazene and etonitazene ) and other substances (such as etizolam,) mixed with fentanyl, which are less responsive or resistant to Naloxone
- the presence of well-established and internationally connected organized crime networks, along with BC’s position as a key shipping hub and transit corridor, has made the province a gateway for fentanyl precursor importations
- precursors and pre-precursors are easily obtained from China, and there is growing concern of the role of India in providing precursor chemicals



## Fentanyl

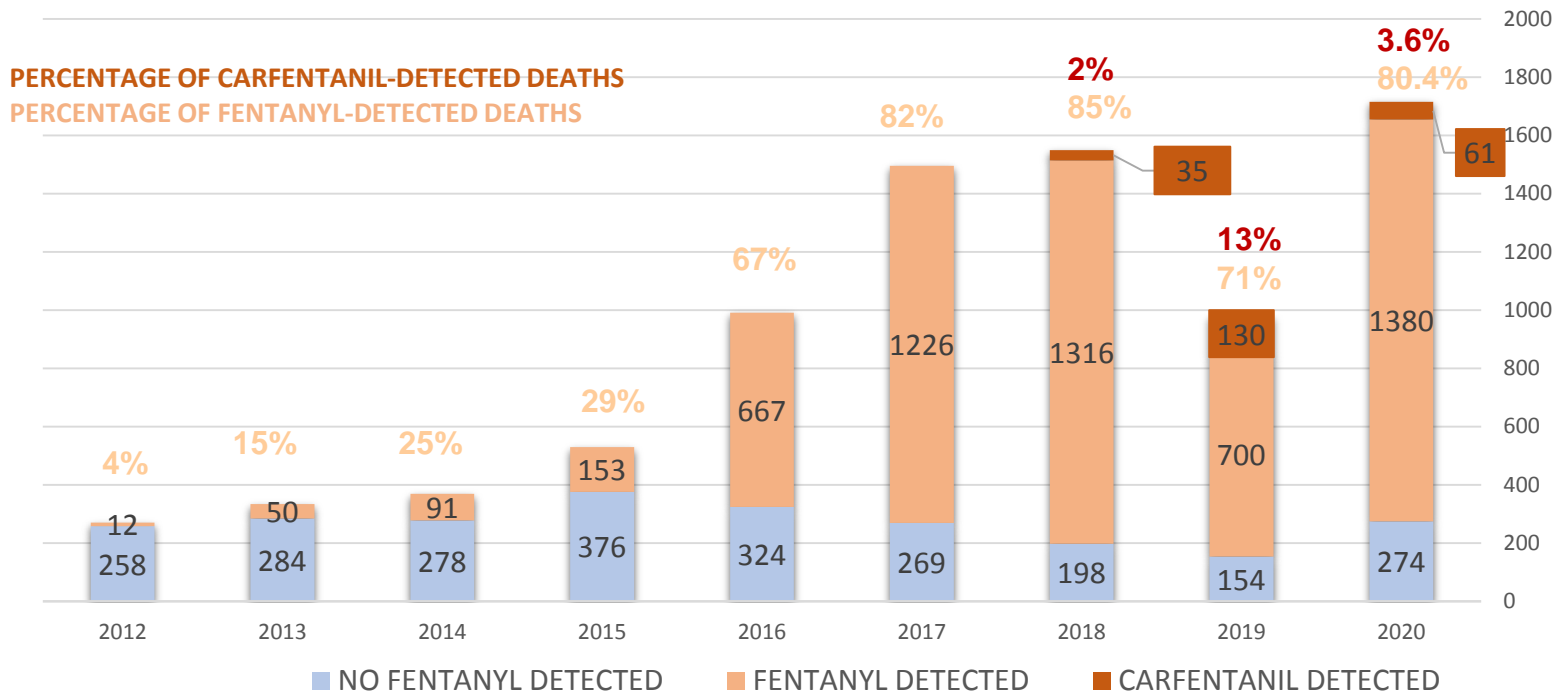
- there is a clear nexus between methamphetamine and fentanyl production. Organized crime groups and independent producers are often concurrently involved in both markets as precursors, chemical vendors, equipment and tradecraft are similar
- BC is supplying other provinces with the drugs and precursors
- lot- and label-tracing of precursors and chemicals has been successful in terms of identifying source(s), however it is time-intensive
- BC's fentanyl overdose crisis is widespread, sustained and well-known, with fentanyl / fentanyl analogues pervasive throughout the illicit drug supply
- 2020 BC Coroners Service reporting reveals an unprecedented number of illicit drug overdose deaths in 2020 (1716), of which 84% (1441) had fentanyl / fentanyl analogues detected.
  - extreme fentanyl concentrations (>50 ug / L) in ~13% (187) of overdose deaths;
  - carfentanil detected in 3.6% overdose deaths
  - increase in the presence of benzodiazapines





## Fentanyl

### FENTANYL PRESENCE IN ILLICIT DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA\*



\*ILLICIT DRUG TOXICITY DEATHS IN BC (2010-01-01 to 2020-12-31) and ILLICIT DRUG TOXICITY TYPE OF DRUG DATA (as of 2020-12-13) BC CORONER SERVICE



## Impact of COVID-19 on Fentanyl, Methamphetamine and Illicit Synthetic Drug Networks

- COVID-19 has had little long-term impact on supply of methamphetamine and fentanyl in British Columbia. In the early stages of the pandemic, reporting pointed to stockpiling and / or decreased production of methamphetamine in Mexico and / or importation of fentanyl from Mexico and China
- at the beginning of the pandemic, methamphetamine and fentanyl prices rose in anticipation of supply disruptions of Mexican imports
- however, BC's production groups were well-placed to source regulated and unregulated chemicals and precursors domestically and internationally
- recent and substantial drops in the pricing of both methamphetamine and fentanyl suggest the market is flooded at the kilo level, and the province has become a main hub, domestic producer and supplier of both methamphetamine and fentanyl

|                     | EARLY 2020         | MID 2020           | EARLY 2021            |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| METHAMPHETAMINE     | \$10K - \$15K / kg | \$25K - \$30K / kg | \$7,500 - \$8500 / kg |
| FENTANYL (DOMESTIC) | \$280K / kg        | \$180K / kg        | \$80K / kg            |



## Impact of COVID-19 on Fentanyl, Methamphetamine and Illicit Synthetic Drug Networks

- reports that Canadian organized crime groups are moving away from importing and trafficking in cocaine in favour of methamphetamine because cocaine is increasingly difficult to obtain
- since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an unprecedented number of illicit street drug overdose deaths in which fentanyl is detected

Contributing factors include:

- using alone
  - poly-substance use
  - loss of income / work
  - social isolation
  - anxiety, depression
  - reduced attendance at overdose prevention sites
- additionally, manufacturing under illicit clandestine laboratory conditions inherently results in the potential for wide-ranging quality issues, drug purity, presence of impurities and insufficient control / testing measures which, in totality, pose considerable risk for consumers



## Continuing Challenges

- precursor and chemical “analogue-ing” introduces molecular modifications to create new substitutes which frequently exist outside current laws
- the speed at which new substances or analogues emerge outpaces the ability to schedule, restrict and / or prohibit the importation, possession or distribution
- robust networks, chemical brokers and third-party purchasers work in the margins of legitimacy to circumvent or defeat proper importation and acquisition processes
- migration of clandestine operations to rural / remote areas where operations are larger and less detectable
- increased use of drainage systems to deposit waste = significant environmental damage and site remediation
- cost of dismantling and disposing chemicals and waste



## Recommendations

- strategic policy and enhanced measures aimed to limit or prohibit the importation, possession and distribution of regulated chemicals, precursors and commercial-sized laboratory equipment needs to be addressed at the national level. Existing regulation is neither sufficiently resourced nor punitive
- current regulations to detect, interdict and seize unregulated / uncontrolled substances used in fentanyl, methamphetamine and illicit synthetic drug production are easily exploited and need to be strengthened
- substance-by-substance scheduling approaches cannot immediately or legally counter alternate or substitute pre-precursors, precursors and chemicals or the flexible and varying synthesis routes used to produce fentanyl, methamphetamine or other illicit synthetic drugs. Appropriate legal measures at the time of their manufacture and trafficking are the chemical version of a “cat and mouse” pursuit
- expedite regulatory controls for chemicals and precursors having a sole purpose to manufacture synthetic drugs (ie no industry use)



**RCMP**

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

# COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

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