

Honourable Senators, I am pleased to be here today to speak to Bill C-224, an Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The Good Samaritan's Drug Overdose Bill is an important piece of a much-needed comprehensive strategy to address the crises occurring in our country.

Fentanyl has created a health crisis that we have not seen before. In 2016, the British Columbia coroner's service reports 914 "illicit" overdose deaths. While the Alberta statistics for the same time period are not publicly available, the Alberta Government reports that from January to September 2016, there have been 338 overdose deaths (193 related to fentanyl 145 to other drugs).

While the response necessary to address this crisis is complex and multi-disciplinary, many of these lives could have been saved with a timely medical intervention. It is incumbent upon us to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent or restrict those overdosing from seeking medical attention. The fear of prosecution has, in the past, presented such a barrier. Bill C-224 will serve to address this.

The current fentanyl crisis highlights the challenges, issues and dangers associated with the illicit drug trade. To be sure, while the harms of fentanyl make headlines across this country, other illicit drugs continue to devastate lives, families and communities. Bill C-224 will not only assist with the current opioid crisis; it will also assist in providing needed and timely medical attention for those overdosing, on other substances.

While Bill C-224 will remove barriers to seeking medical attention, access to "timely" treatment is also necessary to have a lasting impact. All too often, lives are saved through medical interventions only for the same individual to be back on the street suffering from the same addiction and vulnerable to yet another overdose. Bill C-224 will not only increase the ability to access emergency medical treatment, it will also provide the opportunity to engage treatment workers and programs, when available.

The complexities around drug addiction and the illicit drug trade are such that no single discipline has the ability to effectively address the problem. To have meaningful impact on this national crisis, we must adopt a multipronged/holistic approach to address both

the demand and supply sides of the drug equation. To do so, requires a comprehensive, multidisciplinary strategy, a strategy that works across the continuum of, education/prevention, intervention/harm reduction, treatment and enforcement.

Dr. Nicholas Etches Alberta Health Services Medical Officer of Health stated, “I agree the police cannot arrest their way out of this”, he added, “neither can we (doctors) detox our way out of this”.

Dr. Etches is referring to the need for effective harm reduction strategies. Harm reduction combined with treatment is critical to reducing demand. Another important part of this continuum is prevention through education. Treating addictions can be costly and difficult with varying levels of success. Prevention through education provides the opportunity to get in front of the addiction and remains the most impactful and cost effective way to prevent these tragedies. Strong public communication as well as age appropriate messaging integrated into school curriculums is critical to getting ahead of this crisis.

While no single piece of legislation will eliminate all tragedies associated with the illicit drug trade, Bill C-224 combined with an effective communication strategy and proper training, will save lives.

Honourable Senators, thank you for allowing me to speak with you here today.

Trevor Daroux