

## Vulnerable Population COVID-19 Response Resources and Planning

As part of the multifaceted response to the COVID-19 pandemic, specific consideration has been needed for people who use substances and for people who don't have access to safe space to self-isolate. Each of these groups are considered to be at increased risk, and it's recognized that a number of people living in the North fall into both categories. This document has been created to support and inform Northern Health staff and partners of relevant provincial planning and guideline resources, and highlighting the work Northern Health has underway to regionalize response work as it pertains to these populations.

On March 11, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19, a pandemic. In British Columbia, a public health emergency due to COVID-19 was declared on March 17, 2020. British Columbia is in a unique situation, with the current crisis compounding an existing public health emergency declared in April 2016, due to escalating opioid overdoses and related deaths.

At the intersection of these dual public health emergencies are a number of risks, including the risk for overdose and other harms related to an increasingly toxic illicit drug supply, the risk of infection and spread of infection among those with underlying health conditions and who face social marginalization, and risks due to withdrawal for those who must self-isolate or quarantine to prevent the onward spread of COVID-19. Extraordinary measures are needed to support people who use drugs (including alcohol) and prevent ongoing community spread of COVID-19 among a vulnerable, often immune-compromised population.

This protocol is intended to provide clinical guidance to health care providers to support patients to mitigate these competing priorities and compounded risks and enable social distancing and self-isolation measures, where possible, to reduce and prevent the spread of COVID-19. These guidelines are not intended for treatment of substance use disorders but rather to support individuals with substance use disorders to self-isolate or social distance and avoid risk to themselves or others.<sup>1</sup>

- [Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Public Health Emergencies](#)

Northern Health Response to Risk Mitigation during Dual Public Health Emergencies:

- [Memo – Virtual Substance use Clinic](#)
- [Expression of interest for pandemic prescribing](#)
- [Clinical Guideline for COVID-19 Virtual Clinic Substance Use Pathway](#)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bccsu.ca/covid-19/>

- [Risk Mitigation Implementation diagram](#)
- [Risk Mitigation prescribing virtual model and summary](#)
- Clinical response guidelines for Temporary Accommodation for [Terrace](#), [Fort St. John](#), and [Prince George](#)
  - [Northern Health referral form](#) (need to order from [Document Source](#) – document #10-800-7004)
  - [BC Housing referral form](#) (need to order from [Document Source](#) – document #10-800-7005)

The COVID 19 pandemic continues to compound the ongoing health crisis related to high rates of opioid overdose and deaths, as well as acute substance use harms. Health Canada has compiled a number of resources in an effort to provide clarity regarding rules that apply for substance use disorder treatment or providing pharmaceutical grade alternative to the toxic street supply in Canada, in the context of COVID 19.

- [Health Canada toolkit for substance use disorder treatment and pharmaceutical grade alternatives to toxic street supply](#)

In light of the spring 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic, BC Housing, together with local partners, is developing Emergency Response Centres (ERCs) in communities across the province for people who are experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness and are unable to self-isolate. This document outlines a program framework for the new ERCs. This includes target population, service models, operating principles, referral pathways, and roles of partners, including BC Housing, health authorities, independent congregate housing providers, and local governments.

- [BCCDC COVID-19: Joint Provincial Program Framework for Emergency Response Centres](#)

This document provides COVID-19 information and resources for community partners who work with vulnerable people e.g. people experiencing homelessness and/or are under-housed, people with complex care, people who engage in sex work and/or people with mental health and substance use needs.

- [COVID-19 Resources for NH Staff and Community Partners Working with Populations who Experience Vulnerabilities](#)

A brief list of COVID-19 specific resources and supports has been developed for Community Action Teams (CAT) and their members from across the region. This document is aimed to maintain and support up to date information sharing with external community partners including persons with lived experience.

- [Community Action Teams COVID-19 support and resources](#)