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## STATEMENT

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Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions

### **Minister's statement on lives lost to poisoned drugs in August**

VICTORIA – Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, has released the following statement regarding the BC Coroners Service report on illicit drug toxicity deaths in August:

“Today's BC Coroners Service report for August 2023 tells a story we have heard too often. We are not just talking about numbers, we are talking about people. We've lost 174 fathers, daughters, colleagues, neighbours and friends.

“While the number of people who died last month is down slightly from the same month last year and the previous month, the impact on our families and communities remains overwhelming. We see first-hand the deep pain – physical, mental and emotional – that lies behind addiction. Shame and stigma often stand in the way of people getting the help they require. We are actively working to remove these barriers and foster an environment where everyone feels included and supported.

“After hearing first-hand from municipal leaders at the recent Union of British Columbia Municipalities convention, it is clear that communities across B.C. are grappling with the devastating effects of the toxic-drug crisis. Mayors, councillors and local advocates shared stories that underscore the urgency and complexity of what we're facing. This crisis knows no boundaries. It is a shared challenge that calls for a united approach from all levels of government. We are committed to continuing our work with local governments to address the challenges in their communities.

“Building on what we have learned, we are focusing on early intervention and expanding support services everywhere. Through Foundry, we are delivering specialized care for young people so that they have safe, judgment-free spaces when they need it most. We are also expanding local treatment options by adding new bed-based services, withdrawal management (detox), medication-assisted treatment and more, across the province, supporting more people to receive support without leaving their communities.

“For every life lost, the ripple effect is immense, touching families, communities and indeed all of us. These are not simply statistics, these are lives that remind us of the human cost of this ongoing crisis.

“As we face yet another month of irreplaceable lives lost, our focus sharpens on the actionable steps that must be taken to prevent further tragedies. We will continue to do everything we can to save lives and get people the help they need so that losses like those announced today become a memory, not a monthly recurrence.”

**Updated actions on the drug-poisoning response:**

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/escalated-drug-poisoning-response-actions-1>

**Contact:**

Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions  
Media Relations  
250 880-7117

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