

October 12, 2024

Dear Ministers, Premiers and Provincial Public Health Officers,

In January 2024, our 18 year-old daughter was poisoned by fentanyl in a University of Victoria residence, she had a witnessed collapse and died. We are writing to ask you to implement simple mandatory measures to protect the students in your province, so none of them die a preventable death like our daughter.

Sidney was surrounded by bright capable students who had no idea what to do beyond calling for help after she collapsed. They had no access to life saving naloxone in residence. Campus security, trained in CPR and carrying naloxone, arrived with enough time to save Sidney. They waited 9 minutes to give naloxone and 12 minutes prior to initiating basic CPR. The 911 operator took 3.5 minutes just to determine a location on campus, and another 3.5 minutes to decide to dispatch an ambulance. Despite the fact that Sidney was unconscious and blue from the moment 911 asked what happened, the 911 operator never directed life-saving CPR until Sidney had a full cardiac arrest, 15 minutes after the call started. By that time, Sidney had suffered catastrophic brain injury from a lack of oxygen that would kill her. As an emergency physician, I remain shocked that anyone in Canada can die the way our daughter died, from such an easily treatable witnessed event.

What happened to our daughter at the University of Victoria can happen to a student on one of your campuses unless you have appropriate measures in place to protect them. Young people on campus may experiment with pills or powders that they believe to be ecstasy, Adderall, Ativan or cocaine. If they have no tolerance to deadly opioids, they are at very high risk of death if those drugs are contaminated with fentanyl.

Students need a safety net and you have the power to ensure one is present for the students on your campuses. As most of you probably know, fentanyl kills by slowing or stopping a person's breathing. It is very easy to save a person who has been poisoned by fentanyl. Rescue breathing/CPR will keep the person alive. Naloxone will block the effects of the opioid. But time is of the essence, irreversible brain damage will start to occur about 4 minutes after breathing becomes ineffective. The heart will eventually stop and death will occur minutes later.

To help protect your students, we implore you to implement the following on your campuses:

1. Make nasal naloxone widely available across campuses, particularly in student housing. It is useless if it is on the shelf in an office that is only open during office hours, it must be accessible where students live. Some companies sell secure boxes <https://bereadyhealthcare.com/shop/> or <http://overdosekits.com/>
2. Make drug education a mandatory part of orientation. Students need to be informed of the risks of the toxic drug supply, how best to stay safe and how to prevent, recognize and treat an opioid overdose. Put the power in the hands of students to save themselves and each other

3. Develop mandatory overdose prevention protocols and emergency response systems on your campuses. No student should lie unconscious and blue with campus security first responders not supported well enough to know what to do.
4. Make CPR training and naloxone training mandatory in high schools. Every student deserves to know how to respond to a medical emergency. You are neglecting your students if you do not provide this basic simple education. CPR is not just important for overdoses, it is important for anyone who may suffer a cardiac arrest. The ACT foundation can come into the schools in your province and implement this for free <https://actfoundation.ca/>
5. Implement systems to make information regarding overdose and poisoning incidents clearly and promptly available to all students and staff on campus.

If you believe your 911 call system will never fail the way it failed Sidney, you are wrong. Many of your provinces use the same 911 system used in B.C., with rigid protocols that do not allow a 911 operator to go off script. The protocol used did not even consider an overdose with two unconscious blue students, because the word overdose was not offered by the caller, and responders believed the students who had some stiffness and jerking movements from fentanyl were having seizures. If those 911 protocols failed Sidney, they could fail one of your students. Universities can be confusing places to navigate, and it may take time for responders to arrive even if they are dispatched early.

In B.C. there were no minimum safety standards at post-secondary institutions to protect students, there were no mandatory overdose protocols, there was no mandatory naloxone in student residences and there was no mandatory orientation to the toxic drug supply... how to stay safe, how to prevent, recognize and treat an overdose. As the University of Victoria has shown, you cannot rely on individual universities to voluntarily do the right thing to protect its students. Despite opioids being the leading cause of death in B.C. for teens and young adults, and despite Victoria having some of the most contaminated drugs in the country, the University of Victoria put little in place to protect its students. It did not support its security first aid responders well enough for them to be able to act appropriately when they responded to two unconscious students who were blue from a lack of oxygen. In the aftermath of Sidney's death, the university did what it could to keep her death quiet and did little to protect other students. Students at the University of Victoria were never alerted that 3 people had overdosed on its campus in less than a week and that one of them had died. Only after multiple meetings, much bad publicity, multiple news articles, multiple letters, a social media campaign and the intervention of the Post-Secondary Minister who convened an overdose prevention and response steering committee, did the University of Victoria finally agree to install naloxone in its residences.

What happened to our daughter underscore the need for these measures to be mandatory, not voluntary. Nobody should die on a campus after a witnessed collapse from an opioid poisoning. No student should die a preventable death with an audience watching them die. We are sending this letter to all provincial and territorial governments. You have a responsibility to make sure it does not happen on a campus in your province. There are now 1600 emergency nasal naloxone boxes in BC post secondary institutions. Please don't wait for a student to die a preventable death on a campus in your province before implementing similar measures. Carleton University can serve as an excellent template of what needs to be in place to protect students. The initial

Overdose Prevention and Response Guidelines developed in BC for post-secondary institutions in response to Sidney's preventable death can also be used as a starting point to develop your own guidelines:

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/institution-resources-administration/emergency-support/overdose\\_prevention\\_and\\_response\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/institution-resources-administration/emergency-support/overdose_prevention_and_response_guidelines.pdf)

Information about Sidney's preventable death after a fentanyl poisoning at the University of Victoria can be found via our website

<https://sidneyshouldbehere.ca/>

or via the Vancouver Sun

<https://vancouversun.com/feature/bc-student-overdose-death-university-victoria>.

We are willing to help in any way we can.

Sincerely,

Caroline McIntyre, MD and Kenton Starko

<https://sidneyshouldbehere.ca/>

