

SECURING SAFE SUPPLY DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND: SCOPING REVIEW AND KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

Bonn M¹, Touesnard N¹, Cheng B², Pugliese M³, Comeau E⁴, Bodkin C⁵, Brothers TD^{6,7}, Genge L⁸, Lepage C¹⁰, Scheim A¹¹, Werb D¹², Wildeman S⁹, Herder M^{4,9}.

1. *Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada*
2. *Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health, McGill University, Montréal, Quebec, Canada*
3. *Department of Pharmacology, Dalhousie University, Faculty of Medicine, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada*
4. *Faculty of Medicine, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada*
5. *Family Medicine, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada*
6. *Department of Medicine, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada*
7. *UCL Collaborative Centre for Inclusion Health, Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care, University College London, London, UK*
8. *Department of Family Medicine, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada*
9. *Health Law Institute, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada*
10. *Pier Labs, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada*
11. *Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Dornsife School of Public Health, Drexel University, Pennsylvania, USA*
12. *Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

Word Count: 296/300

Topics:

- Interventions to enhance health care for people who inject drugs
- Public health policy and service delivery planning

Background: Safe supply refers to a legal and regulated supply of drugs with mind/body altering properties that traditionally have been accessible only through illegal drug markets. In response to COVID-19 mitigation measures, safe supply interventions are being scaled-up in Canada. We undertook a scoping review to identify key concepts, strategies, and gaps including barriers/facilitators in the evidence with respect to implementing safe supply during public health emergencies.

Methods: We searched five databases for peer-reviewed and grey literature on the provision of regulated, pharmaceutical drugs during public health emergencies from 01/01/2002 to 06/30/2020, and abstracted themes about barriers and facilitators to accessing and/or prescribing safe supply. Themes were coded and analyzed iteratively. Our research team was led by PWUD, academics, medical and legal scholars, and students. Additionally, we established a pan Canadian PWUD expert committee to advise the research.

Results: We screened 9,839 references and included 168 studies, of which 119 articles reported on barriers/facilitators. Few studies (n=24) focused on emergency or pandemic contexts. We identified 35 themes of barriers/facilitators to accessing safe supply. Among the most frequently reported barriers were *restrictive laws or policies* (n= 33; 28%). The most frequently cited facilitator was *temporary regulatory exemptions* (n= 16; 13%). Consultation with prescribers and PWUD identified barriers/facilitators lacking in the reviewed literature, for instance, social and economic inequities among PWUD.

Conclusion: To address the overdose crisis stemming from the poisonous drug supply, efforts are needed to scale-up and concurrently evaluate safe supply initiatives that address the facilitators/barriers identified. With the quality/quantity of the substance assured, PWUD are in a far better position to confront the risks associated with drug use. With few peer-reviewed studies on safe supply models, particularly during emergencies, the expertise of PWUD and prescribers have essential insights that are not reflected in the literature.

Disclosure of interests' statement: MB reports personal fees from AbbVie and grants and personal fees from Gilead Sciences, outside of the submitted work. MH is a member of the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, Canada's national drug price regulator. He receives honoraria for his public service.

