

Prescribed Safer Supply: A Public Health Ethics Framework

Daniel Buchman

Bioethicist and Scientist

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Associate Professor

Dalla Lana School of Public Health

University of Toronto

CAMH Land Acknowledgement

CAMH is situated on lands that have been occupied by First Nations for millennia; lands rich in civilizations with knowledge of medicine, architecture, technology and extensive trade routes throughout the Americas. The site of CAMH appears in colonial records as the council grounds of the Mississaugas of the New Credit. Toronto is now home to a vast diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis who enrich this city.

CAMH is committed to reconciliation. We will honour the land through programs and places that reflect and respect its heritage. We will embrace the healing traditions of the Ancestors, and weave them into our caring practices. We will create new relationships and partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis – share the land and protect it for future generations.

mental
health
is
health

camh



Shkaabe Makwa

COMMENTARY ■ VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

A safer drug supply: a pragmatic and ethical response to the overdose crisis

Mark Tyndall MD ScD

A Review of Prescribed Safer Supply Programs Across British Columbia: Recommendations for Future Action

Appendix C

Ethical Analysis of the Prescribed Safer Supply Policy in British Columbia:

Final Report and Recommendations

BC Provincial Health Ethics Advisory Team
November 3, 2023



Original research

Prescribing safe supply: ethical considerations for clinicians

Katherine Duthie ,¹ Eric Mathison,^{1,2} Helgi Eyford,³ S Monty Ghosh⁴

SAFE SUPPLY

CONCEPT DOCUMENT

February 2019

Alternatives to the Toxic Drug Supply An Ethical Analysis

Eike-Henner W. Kluge, PhD, FRSC

AMA Journal of Ethics®

August 2020, Volume 22, Number 8: E723-728

POLICY FORUM

How Structural Violence, Prohibition, and Stigma Have Paralyzed North American Responses to Opioid Overdose

Mark Tyndall, MD, ScD and Zoë Dodd, MES

Why Public Health Ethics?

Attends to the obligations of societies toward its members, especially the least well-off

Highlights structural and socioeconomic inequities, risk reduction, epidemiology, and health promotion and prevention

Grounded in public health values of justice, equity, human rights, and community



Ethics Frameworks

- Ethics frameworks have a long history of supporting decision-making processes and informing public health emergencies and interventions
 - Frameworks can help decision-makers decide what they should do, why and how they should do it
 - The drug toxicity crisis mirrors the urgency of public health emergencies where competing values, scientific uncertainty, and divergent interests at the individual and population levels all influence the decision-making process
-



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

[Français](#)

Search Canada.ca



MENU ▾

[Canada.ca](#) > [Health](#) > [Diseases and conditions](#) > [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#) > [Canada's response](#)

Public health ethics framework: A guide for use in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada

On this page

- [Introduction](#)
- [Ethical values and principles](#)
- [Ethical framework](#)
- [Selected resources](#)
- [Acknowledgements](#)

Substantive Ethics Considerations

Ethical Principles and Values	Examples
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrating trustworthiness to SS program service users and service providers
Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addressing barriers to equitable care, including economic welfare (i.e., distributive justice), intersecting structural forces of oppression (i.e., social justice), and stigma
Respect for Persons, Communities, and Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respecting the specific needs and priorities of the affected community/ies

Substantive Ethics Considerations

Ethical Principles and Values	Examples
Promoting Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognizing the communal responsibility to contribute to the welfare of others
Minimizing Harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritizing ways to minimize the risk of harm in all forms, particularly for groups that are disproportionately burdened by the unregulated drug toxicity crisis
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Measuring effectiveness of a given intervention based on comprehensive understanding of the best available evidence, synthesizing findings empirically, normatively, and relationally

Substantive Ethics Considerations

Ethical Principles and Values	Examples
Proportionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balancing the potential population benefits of the intervention against the potential risks
Reciprocity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledging the individual and societal obligation to promote an environment that advances the common good
Precaution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementing evidence, as it evolves, to create preventative measures and respond to the nature of urgency
Working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• promotes values of solidarity and collaboration at levels of community, research, and beyond

Procedural Ethics Considerations

Procedural Considerations	Relevant Ethical Values and Principles	Application to Safer Supply
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust• Promoting well-being• Reciprocity• Working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Holding decision-makers accountable for their influence on decision-making to the directly affected population (i.e. PWUD) and the broader community/ies
Openness and Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust• Justice• Promoting well-being• Reciprocity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoting awareness of the rationale, approach, and opportunities to engage in the decision-making processes

Procedural Ethics Considerations

Procedural Considerations	Relevant Ethical Values and Principles	Application to Safer Supply
Inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Justice• Respect for persons, communities, and human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using diverse methods of engagement with PWUD and affected communities in all feasible aspects of safer supply program design, implementation, and evaluation
Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimising harm• Effectiveness• Proportionality• Precaution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing decisions based on the best available emerging evidence amidst the rapidly evolving nature of the drug toxicity crisis
Intersectionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Justice• Respect for persons, communities, and human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrating diverse, intersectional perspectives of PWUD to inform safer supply programs that improve social, clinical, public, and population level health

The **right thing to do** will not be addressed by scientific evidence alone but is also a matter of values



What Do You Think?

Questions for Discussion



What counts as **evidence**?
What evidence matters most
and for what decisions?



How should clinical and public
health decision-making be
approached under conditions of
uncertainty?



How should we best address
the **ethical** issues related to
safer supply at the clinical and
population levels?





Thank You

daniel.buchman@camh.ca

danielbuchman@bsky.social