

Helping to inform Canada's opioid response

The inappropriate use of prescription opioids has emerged as a significant public health and safety issue in Ontario and across Canada. Work conducted at ICES contributed to the speed with which Ontario has modelled for other provinces the collection of timely and robust data and analysis for an evidence-informed response to the opioid crisis.

ICES scientist **Tara Gomes** is principal investigator of the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network (ODPRN), in which ICES is a partner. A 2016 *CMAJ paper* co-authored by Gomes demonstrated that national vital statistics can be used to analyze prescription opioid-related mortality with considerable accuracy in the absence of more sophisticated surveillance systems, to accelerate national surveillance and monitoring strategies. Gomes's methodology used ICES linked data for validation and is now being replicated in other provinces. The paper was awarded the 2017 Article of the Year by the CIHR's Institute of Health Services and Policy Research.

At the local level, ongoing data collection and analysis contributed by ICES and ODPRN about patterns of opioid use for each of the province's public health units and Local Health Integration Networks has been helping to inform rapid regional responses to the opioid crisis.

ICES research also helped to inform the Canadian Medical Association's 2015 policy statement on harms associated with opioids and other psychoactive prescription drugs, which recommended the launch of a comprehensive national strategy. ICES senior scientist **David Juurlink** presented at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health during the strategy formulation in October 2016, and delivered a keynote address at Canada's national Opioid Conference the following month.

Also informed by ICES/ODPRN research, Ontario's Strategy to Prevent Opioid Addiction and Overdose is now being implemented. In January 2017, based on an ODPRN analysis, Ontario delisted high-strength formulations of long-acting opioids from the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary to help prevent addiction and support appropriate prescribing. ICES and ODPRN have been conducting ongoing rapid analysis of opioid utilization patterns, including an analysis of palliative care patients to determine the policy's potential impact on this patient population.

Tara Gomes



David Juurlink



The work of ICES and ODPRN has helped to drive **rapid, targeted regional responses** to the opioid crisis.



ICES research helped to inform **Ontario's Strategy to Prevent Opioid Addiction and Overdose**, now being implemented, including the delisting of high-strength formulations of long-acting opioids from the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary.



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