



Opioid Use: Deconstructing Media Messages

To explore the topic of opioid use and the media, we suggest using two recent news reports about fentanyl overdoses in BC. Both reports follow first responders in situations where one or more people have overdosed on fentanyl. However, the differences between the two are interesting and may reflect different attitudes and beliefs about drug use, and the people who use opioids in particular.

The goal of this instructional outline is to increase awareness about the elements of a media story and their potential to influence our thoughts and behaviour and to develop critical skills in deconstructing the media messages about drug use.

Instructional strategies

1. Ask students to read the [CBC news report](#) and [National Post report](#) about fentanyl overdoses in Vancouver and facilitate a discussion about how the language and images of these pieces of media impact the messages that reach the reader. You might use questions such as those below:
 - a. Compare and contrast the opening sentences of the two articles. What emotional response is encouraged by each? How does that play out in the rest of each article?
 - b. How are the people who use drugs described in each article? Think about the language used to talk about them (names, descriptors, labels, expressions) as well as the images used. Are they similar or different? How? Are the portrayals linked to the way the articles are introduced?
 - c. What impact do labels have on people (the people who are labelled, the people around them, the people who use the labels)? Have you ever been labelled? How did it make you feel? Why?
 - d. Compare and contrast these two reflections:

Vancouver firefighter: "You just walk by lines of different people shooting up and then you treat the third one on the left, and it's just a matter of time before the first two go down as well."

Delta police officer: "Once we were in our rhythm, I started to think, 'Who else?' ... 'How many more?'"

How are they similar? How are they different? What messages does each send?
 - e. What do you think accounts for the differences between these two reports of opioid overdoses?
 - f. How might each report influence readers to think about
 - drugs?
 - the people who use drugs?
 - the solutions to the current overdose problem?

