Overdoses Have Reduced Life Expectancy for British Columbians With HIV

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The life expectancy of people living with HIV in British Columbia has increasingly declined in recent years due to a troubling rise in overdose deaths in the population, aidsmap reports.

Martin St-Jean, MSc, of the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS presented findings from an analysis of life expectancy among people living with HIV in the Canadian province at the International AIDS Conference, which was held virtually last month.

St-Jean and his colleagues analyzed data from a vital statistics database on 10,362 people with HIV age 20 or older in the British Columbia HIV/AIDS Drug Treatment Program clinical registry. The cohort members all started antiretroviral treatment between April 1996 and December 2017.

More than four fifths of the cohort were men. The median age was 40 years old. About one in four injected drugs, and nearly a quarter had a CD4 count below 200.

A total of 266 members (3%) of the cohort died of drug overdoses during the study period, while 1,989 (19%) died of other causes and 117 (1%) died of an undetermined cause. Among those who died of overdoses, 162 (61%) used narcotics or hallucinogens, 19 (7%) used sedatives, anti-epileptic medications or psychotropic drugs, and 85 (32%) used drugs that were unspecified and that primarily target muscle or the respiratory system.

During the 20-year study period as a whole, a prototypical 20-year-old person with HIV could expect to live 3.7 fewer years because of overdose deaths in the HIV population.

During 1996 to 2001, a 20-year-old would have lost 1.5 years from his or her life expectancy due to overdoses. That figure increased to 1.9 lost years during 2002 to 2007, 3.6 lost years during 2008 to 2013 and 9.7 lost years during 2014 to 2017. During the latter period, a 20-year-old could expect to live to 55 but could expect to live to 65 without overdoses in the HIV population.

To read the aidsmap article, click here.

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