Benodiazepines are a class of drugs that slow down the central nervous system and are primarily used to treat anxiety and insomnia. Ativan and Xanax are included in this class of drugs. Benzodiazepine toxicity can occur when benzodiazepines are taken in high doses or with other central nervous system depressants, such as alcohol or opioids.

Between 2013 and 2020

32,674 Encounters for benzodiazepine-related toxicity

- 7% Decrease in the overall rate of benzodiazepine-related toxicity in the province
- 44% Increase in youth ≤18
- 67% Increase in young adults 19-24
- 8% Increase in adults 25-34

By 2020, the rate among young adults aged 19 to 24 was at least 2 times higher than any other age group

Benzodiazepine toxicity incidents involving other substances (such as opioids, alcohol, or stimulants) increased, reaching almost 30% by 2020

In 50% of benzodiazepine toxicity encounters in 2020, the patient had an active benzodiazepine prescription, although this declined over the study period

Almost 50% of people who experienced a benzodiazepine toxicity incident had a hospital encounter for a mental health or substance use disorder in the year prior, most commonly:

- 19% Anxiety disorders
- 19% Mood disorders
- 16% Substance use disorders

To reduce benzodiazepine-related harm, there is a need for:

- Strengthening access to mental health services, particularly for youth and young adults
- Safe alternatives to the unregulated drug supply
- Drug checking services

For more information