

Benzodiazepine-related toxicities rising among Ontario youth and young adults despite declining provincial rate

Benzodiazepines 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

3 of every 5 Benzodiazepine toxicity encounters affected **females**

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

Campbell, T., Men, S., Shearer, D., Ebejer, T., Joosse, M., Quercia, J., Sanders, J., Tadrous, M., Antoniou, T., Gomes, T. (2023). [The epidemiology of benzodiazepine-related toxicity in Ontario, Canada: A population-based descriptive study.](#) *Canadian Journal of Public Health.*



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