

(U) Canada Approves Prescription Heroin for Drug Addicts



**DEA
BULLETIN**



**Strategic
Intelligence
Section**



(U) This DEA Bulletin is based on preliminary reporting and may be subject to updating as additional information becomes available.

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(U) Event

(U) In September 2016, the Canadian Government legalized the use of pharmaceutical-grade heroin to treat severe addicts who have not responded to conventional methods of treatment. Canadian doctors can now apply to Health Canada—the federal department responsible for public health—for access to diacetylmorphine to treat patients having critical heroin addiction. Although doctors at the Crosstown Clinic in Vancouver, Canada, have been administering prescription heroin to addicts since late 2014, this program is the first of its kind at the national level.

(U) Significance

(U) By approving the use of pharmaceutical-grade heroin for treatment and rehabilitation of chronic users, Canada joins eight European nations that have similar programs. This is another step by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government to reverse many of the previous administrations' addiction and drug abuse treatment policies. Supporters of the policy welcomed the federal government's decision. Opponents in the Conservative party are adamantly against the use of prescription heroin as a form of treatment for addicts.

(U) Details

(U) Canada is dealing with a major public health crisis relating to opioid overdoses and deaths. In British Columbia alone, there were over 400 opiate-related fatal overdoses in 2015. With the recent introduction of fentanyl into the

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Canadian drug market, that number is expected to reach 800 this year. Fentanyl is cheaper and easier to smuggle into the country than heroin, and it can also be mixed with heroin or other opiates, making the drug extremely dangerous for all users.

(U//DSEN) According to the DEA Ottawa Country Office, it is unlikely that the heroin obtained by Canadian physicians (under the umbrella of Health Canada's Special Access Program (SAP)) will be diverted. However, the potential for diversion cannot be ignored. The policy is sanctioned under Health Canada's SAP, which "...provides access to nonmarketed drugs for practitioners treating patients with serious or life-threatening conditions when nonconventional therapies have failed, are unsuitable, or unavailable." This new authorization allows doctors to prescribe diacetylmorphine to their most severely addicted patients when other forms of treatment—notably methadone—fail to help.

(U) From 2005 to 2008, Canadian researchers conducted a study called the North American Opiate Medication Initiative to examine the impacts of prescription heroin treatment for chronic heroin users. According to the results of the study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, prescription heroin is a safe and effective treatment for those with a severe heroin addiction who have not benefited from other treatments. This study will likely serve as an important source of information for proponents of the new government policy.

(U) This product was prepared by the DEA Strategic Intelligence Section. Comments and questions may be addressed to the Chief, Analysis and Production Section at dea.onsi@usdoj.gov.



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