

not the symptoms, but the why

What is 'below the surface' that is contributing to children/youth's substance use and/or the toxic drugs crisis?

normalization

Systematic issues with accessibility to services and supports that young people need

poverty, housing instability, disconnection, anxiety

scared and fearful adults

political dialogue not routed in evidence

toxic drugs, the drugs today are not the drugs 15 or 20 years ago

Disconnect from community, cultural supports, family supports.

extremely toxic drugs

not the symptoms, but the why

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rural/urban inequities

Mental Health + Stigma

intergenerational
trauma

adults are afraid, have no
place to take that fear, and
making decisions that are
not good for youth

ACES

Need to know more about the
breakdown of the Big Stats
(72% MCFD), why are they in
contact with MCFD since
addiction services are with
Health.

Trauma or ACE experiences
that lead to substance use
as a way of coping

systems that were never
designed to address this
kind of complexity; they are
not benevolent

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What is 'below the surface' that is contributing to children/youth's substance use and/or the toxic drugs crisis?

lack of supporting upstream programming or recognition of social determinants of health

Social determinants of health

Intergenerational trauma

the drugs today are more powerful than they were and the framework and treatment does not work the same

The biases and assumptions that are out there in society about teenagers. Seen as troubled and problematic.

Stigma

Few opportunities to engage with a purpose and people, especially for those who need it most.

Loss of language. Loss of Voice in all spaces - education, healthcare, child welfare, justice.

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Trauma - emotional, physical, sexual or neglect

Adverse Childhood Experiences

have some good services but not knitted together

Lack of security/safety (parents and children).

Perceived safety

trauma, FASD, not feeling like they belong

Attachment traumas

no coordination of services and system focussed not Youth Focussed

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Mental model - paternalistic views of "we adults know what is best for you kids"

Toxicity of the drugs are much worse, and we need to come up with ways to protect youth.

Indigenous-specific determinant of health

Lack of adult courage to stand up

Two separate issues
Youth SU and the Toxic Drug Crisis

Disconnection from cultural identity

Toxic drugs. (Period)

Challenge in accessing services and supports. Either having the adult support to navigate the system or the confusing process to access services - trying to find the right door.

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Colonial system and racism.

acknowledging the role white supremacy has on the lives of the 2/3rds of youth experiencing this

mental model: youth are too immature to decide for themselves VS. mental model: youth have agency/right to decide for themselves whether to use

Lack of easy to access resources and treatment for neurodiverse population

Different mandates, responsibilities, and definitions

Racism, societal pressures against marginalized youth, and othering thinking that contributes to simplistic "bad people make bad choices" ideas.

MCFD structure and culture is a barrier to collaboration and needs a full organizational review

Economic inequalities

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Systemic racism

Stop relying on the heroic efforts of individuals and establish systems that reach people and provide flexible services that align with a breadth of substance-related or other personal goals.

gaps in health system

Learning traumas - learning disabilities, etc.

Colonial systems not working for youth

lack of purpose, lack of spaces to heal, variety of trauma - MH, disabilities, attachment, abuse...combined with mainstream system challenges and easy access,

complex problem with multiple solutions.

Lack of communication between governing bodies

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Illegal drug 'industry'

Lack of a sense of community

socio economic inequity

Loss of safety - they don't feel safe anywhere. They need extra spaces that are theirs to exist judgement free.

government not holding accountabilities internally

Youth Today are dealing with at least 3 things that no previous generation has faced: Navigating the COVID Pandemic, Climate Anxiety, and the Impacts of Social Media. These are all below surface.

Peer oriented and peer driven

Lack of purpose

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narrow focus vs.
population health
perspective

There is a lack of bravery at the political level to use the solutions that have been proven to work. What is getting in the way of implementing those solutions?

Criminal exploitation of youth who are at risk/vulnerable

mental health support is not part of MSP

structure: systems are delivering exactly what we designed them to do, e.g. health care system is transactional so youth don't engage but this is how we designed the incentives, structure and delivery

Systemic Racism and Inequality

rigidity of systems such as education, health

The systems we have are generally set up to catch kids at the end of the river, at the precipice, or falling OVER the waterfall; yet an entire river of lifetime experiences lead to addictions.

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Lack of transition planning and availability of resources

Intergenerational trauma resulted from colonialism

All voices should be respected.

healthcare providers don't know how to care for youth, and may be unwilling to do the hard work.

lack of political will

involving frontline workers in planning sooner than later

Easy access to so many substances

intergenerational trauma, lack of connection to land/culture

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info sharing legislative and cultural barriers impacting response to SUB for C&Y. Need to be able to share information earlier not just in crisis.

Drug prohibition and criminalization create a context where there are no health and safety standards for the production and distribution of drugs. This is a key driver of the toxic drug crisis.

Stigma around substance use and a lack of safe supply and supervised sites for youth causes youth to use secretly, alone, and/or in other less safe ways.

fragmented/disconnected systems

challenging assumptions as to who is at risk

not enough mental health services that are youth centred and low barrier and low cost

Not "making it easy," to get care and navigate treatment.

no trusted adult to access/connect with...no trust built with supportive adults or peers

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Normalization of substance use as a solution to emotional pain

overpolicing - criminalization

Youth Care Workers and Social Workers are experiencing PTSD more often; due to losing youth to toxic drugs. It's beyond burnout and compassion fatigue.

Need cross govt table dedicated to Children and Youth

The stigma there still is about substance use.

Government accountability. Where has the money gone?

Public opinion on addiction and addicts - 'who cares, it's a choice, let them die' - see this on social media daily

the role racism plays in this with the amount of first nations youth suffering from this

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Lack of timely services that are also appropriately designed for children and youth

Treating substance use and mental health separately.

The availability of toxic drugs that contribute to death.

Stigma and judgement

Not understanding the developmental stages of youth

strong feelings and philosophical positions overpower evidence

Toxic drugs are a result of failed drug policy

mental health concerns with only rigid clinical services offered and long wait lists - self soothing

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settler colonial systems are not trusted at individual or community level by Indigenous and other marginalized groups

Conversations but not actionable outcomes

questions that reflect the complexity of the presenting situation

Youth SU: to an extent SU of some kind is a universal behavior- denying this results in engagement on the topic, service access when SU isn't an issue, before the issue is problematic..

normalization of substance use in some communities

Lack of trust in others and even lack of trust in themselves

we have never cracked how to truly address the social determinants of health - youth are having to worry about things like housing, income, future because we haven't got the SDoH figured out

Racism/bias. Being funneled into streams where nothing is expected of them. Low expectations.

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need to focus on generational change, not four year political cycles

Toxic Drug Supply

need to organize around government cycles to advocate for change

No real champion within government who can impact change, legislation is needed - who is going to protect those who use drugs.

Systems CAUSE complexity. They are not designed to be benevolent.

Delayed access to supports

Intergenerational trauma, childhood trauma, economic marginalization, disconnection, and unaddressed mental health challenges are all drivers of substance use

Child and Youth Mental Health Crisis.

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we exclude children from service until they are sick enough for help and do more damage while they wait

Supporting families, championing wellness, addressing housing and food insecurity, access to meaningful activities

purpose found in gangs/using with others who are also struggling - connection found with others who use

Not enough of a value on youth, their needs, voices, and agency of children and youth, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Youth need healthy risk-taking opportunities

growing neurodiversity population we are not caring for in SUB. Need to respond to intersectionality

Insufficient prevention and education

The reasons that youth use substances are the same as why anyone use substances..

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Ministries are silo'ed - MCFD, Health, and Education need to radically collaborate among and with each other, rather than have these Ministries operate in silos.

Need to address the problems in community and life after substance use

Harm Reduction is more than just overdose prevention and we do a disservice to focus too narrowly

There has been a de-sensitization, or normalization of young people dying - even though it is not aligned with the life cycle or our common understanding of adolescence.

We need to do the things that we know work- why isn't naloxone accessed by all services that work with youth..

We are going backwards in the criminalization of substance use again. How do we educate and raise awareness about root cause and necessary responses?

Why aren't we having difficult conversations with youth allowing for the likelihood that they are using substances, that have been exposed to substances

Gang Violence issues - and general violence, and traumatic events in society.

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We need to intentionally offer all children positive childhood experiences.

generational differences in experiences of drugs, and how we talk about it. IE. I am from the generation that grew up during DARE and the "war on drugs" that is not the world we live in now