

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police



OACP

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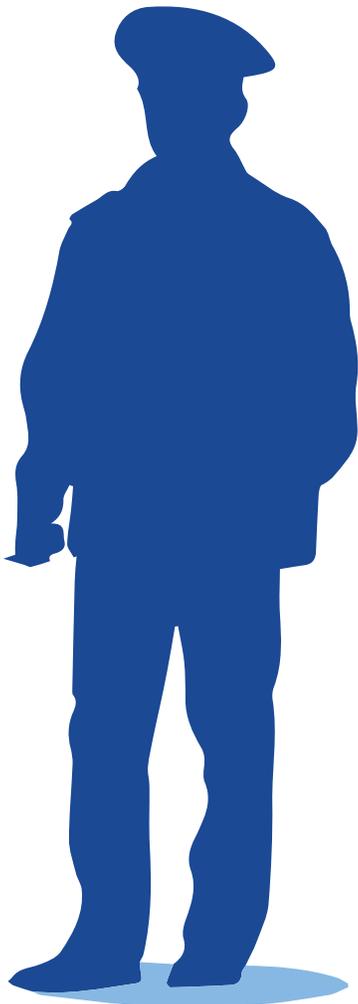
The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP): Ontario's Police Leaders

During the 1930s, Ontario's Chiefs of Police determined that the existing standards in policing were inadequate to meet the demands of a modern society. The challenges of emerging technology to law enforcement brought policing standards of the day into sharper focus. Chiefs of Police had played an active role in the Chief Constables' Association of Canada since its inception in 1905. However, that national association was not meeting the specific needs of provincial Chiefs.

By 1951, Ontario Chiefs of Police identified a need to re-establish themselves as a recognized police interest group on a provincial level and founded the Chief Constables' Association of Ontario (CCAO). This association gradually evolved, opening membership to senior officers and police managers. The CCAO's influence was a significant factor in the establishment of the Ontario Police College in 1963, an initiative that enhanced the organization's prestige and growth. A formal name change to the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) was adopted in 1965.

In 1993-94, the OACP was licensed to deliver the Constable Selection System (CSS) in partnership with the Ministry of Solicitor General, a selection tool now widely used to improve the quality of candidates for the position of constable in Ontario's police services. Recognizing the need for Executive Training, the OACP cooperated with the Ontario Police College to conduct a police executive "Training Needs Assessment" in 2000. This was followed by the launch of a competency-based executive development "Police Leadership Program" (PLP) with the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management (University of Toronto) in April 2001. The PLP continues to be offered to leaders within police services.

Today, the OACP has more than 1,400 members and represents the RCMP, the OPP, First Nations, and municipal police services. Members are divided into seven categories: Active, Associate Affiliate, Honorary, Life, Associate, Associate Retired, and Affiliate. The association's members maintain a global perspective by going beyond provincial issues to address national and international concerns.



Message from the OACP Intelligence & Organized Crime Committee

Law enforcement plays a part in countering the effects of crimes perpetrated by those who seek to commit crimes. We have a responsibility to help everyone be safe wherever they live.

Ontario is a great place to live. Diverse workplaces, vibrant communities, safe public spaces, caring neighbourhoods and businesses, amazing natural beauty – these are just some of the things that make Ontario special. As Ontario's police leaders, members of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) know that they have a responsibility to help everyone be safe wherever they live. Being a victim of crime takes away from the safety and well-being that every person in Ontario has a right to.

As society evolves to meet the changing needs of Ontarians, our police services also change to meet evolving public safety needs. That's why crime prevention is so important to us. We also know, that just as police services evolve, so do criminal organizations who prey on vulnerable people, businesses, people groups, etc.

Law enforcement plays a part in countering the effects of crimes perpetrated by those who seek to commit crimes. This document seeks to bring organized crime "Out of the Shadows". It is our hope that everyone reading this resource document will resolve to play their part in keeping Ontario safe.



ALERT

Modern organized crime is borderless and capitalizes on vast global networks. It takes a collaborative approach on the part of law enforcement, government, and the community to effectively combat such criminal organizations.

Organized Crime in Ontario

Introduction



Our understanding of organized crime is often influenced by popular culture (films, books, television shows, etc.) and biographies of retired or reformed criminals. However, we know that popularized accounts of organized crime can desensitize the public to its true nature and impact. Organized crime can erroneously be seen to operate in a world of its own, with little consequence to our communities. Organized crime has real economic and social costs, is present in almost every facet of society, and affects the daily lives of Ontarians.

This report addresses some common misconceptions and beliefs about organized crime, particularly regarding its structure, composition, methods of operation, activities, and motivations. The third section, which forms the bulk of this report, provides an overview of some key organized crime issues. Issue-areas are supplemented by information on associated socio-economic costs, emerging trends, and phenomena, and recent law enforcement investigations and projects. In addition, tips are included on how the public can help identify crimes and how citizens can help further educate themselves about particular criminal markets. The conclusion emphasizes the important role that the public plays in helping Ontario law enforcement mitigate the threat of organized crime.

Through this report, we hope that Ontarians will gain a greater understanding of organized crime so that they can be better equipped to take precautionary measures to keep themselves safe from crime. We also hope individuals will be willing to assist Ontario law enforcement organizations fight the types of crimes criminal organizations engage in. Although it cannot completely be eliminated, organized crime and its impacts can be significantly lessened if law enforcement works hand-in hand with the public.



ALERT

Public perception of the nature of organized crime is mainly derived from popular culture. Although there is some reality to caricatures portrayed in movies and fiction, organized crime appears in many forms, varying in its structure, composition, methods of operation, activities, and motivations.

WHAT IS ORGANIZED CRIME?

The Criminal Code of Canada defines that any group of three or more persons committing a serious offence for the purpose of material gain is considered a “Criminal Organization”. This includes groups with exclusive memberships as well as individuals that work together to facilitate criminal activity. Individuals working within particular criminal networks may not regard themselves as members of a criminal organization, and may not be perceived by outsiders as operating within a criminal organization. Nevertheless, these networks come together in a series of criminal projects and display a measure of an organization that allows them to achieve results beyond what each individual could achieve by working alone.

There are hundreds of Organized Crime Groups (OCGs) with a presence in Ontario. These groups often work in tandem with other OCGs to collaborate and achieve common goals, and play a specific role in the illicit activity or outsource roles and activities. Such interconnected networks create larger, intertwined networks, thus increasing the potential of one individual group. Criminals do not need to self-identify to be members of organized crime, and may not be easy to recognize and identify. For example, some Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs (OMGs) wear specific clothing and patches to indicate membership. However, some OCGs are less overt.



ALERT

Organized Crime Groups know that police are challenged with tremendous fiscal and resource constraints. OCG's see this as an advantage and capitalize by expanding their operations, networks, and influence while police deal with emerging technology, legal decisions such as *R. vs Jordan*, and privacy rulings, which are personnel and resource intensive.

CLARIFYING THE TERM MAFIA.

The term “mafia” is often used interchangeably with “organized crime”.

Mafia actually refers to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra of Italy, and is also commonly used to describe an American criminal organization comprised of Americans of Sicilian Heritage.

What is organized crime?

Canada’s Criminal Code Definition Section 467.1 (1) if the Criminal Code of Canada states that a ‘criminal organization’ means a group, however, organized, that:

- is composed of three or more persons in
- (a) or outside of Canada; and
- has as one of its main purposes or main
- (b) activities the facilitation or commission of one or more serious offences that, if committed, would likely result in the direct or indirect receipt of a material benefit, including a financial benefit, by the group or by any of the persons who constitute the group.

It does not include a group of persons that forms randomly for the immediate commission of a single offence.

United Nations Definition

Article 2 (a) of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime states that an ‘Organized criminal group’ shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefits.



Debunking popular media stereotypes

Popular culture often portrays organized crime members in a positive light to allow viewers to sympathize and relate to the characters to increase viewership and ratings. Characters often have justification for the crimes they commit and the effects of their actions are rarely the focus of the plot. In reality, organized crime has serious implications and detrimental effects on communities.

Impact of Organized Crime in Ontario

There are many different types of illicit activities committed by OCGs. All Ontarians are affected directly or indirectly by organized crime, sometimes without even being aware. An individual may be the victim of fraud and personally affected by monetary loss, or an individual may be affected by an increase in insurance premiums due to an increase in insurance fraud. It is sometimes difficult to identify and recognize all of the impacts of organized crime.

Law enforcement agencies, as well as provincial and federal regulatory agencies, employ numerous resources to combat organized crime. Resource allocation committed to combat organized crime adversely affects the ability to fund other programs in Ontario. Other governmental resources are indirectly affected by organized crime such as Emergency Medical Services (EMS), hospitals, and firefighters. An increase in overdoses in a community due to a surge in available illicit drugs, such as fentanyl, can consume emergency and medical resources.

Reported Criminal Activities of Organized Crime

OCGs are often involved in multiple illicit activities, diversifying income streams, and also partaking in opportunistic illicit activities. Although some crime groups have developed a niche in their criminal market, criminals are often seeking the most lucrative avenue with a minimal amount of risk and can be flexible with their illicit activities.

Some OCGs demonstrate high levels of sophistication which have made the use of traditional law enforcement techniques difficult. Criminals have adapted and developed new techniques and applied technology to facilitate criminal activity and to evade law enforcement.



COVID-19, A Catalyst for Organized Crime

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on the criminal landscape in Ontario, all across Canada, and the world. The primary objective of organized crime is to exploit every gap in civil society to expand their illicit profits and influence, resulting in immeasurable harm to communities in Ontario and all across Canada. Public health measures implemented at the federal and provincial levels likely made it more difficult for organized crime to operate. These measures decreased revenue in their typical criminal activities and may have expanded into other illicit activities. One element of organized crime that has not changed during the pandemic is their commitment to targeting the most vulnerable in our communities.

Illicit drug trafficking was and continues to be impacted by the pandemic. International restrictions at ports-of-entries likely made it more difficult to import and export illegal goods, such as drugs and guns. Consequently, some illicit goods probably faced supply issues. Fentanyl, a drug linked to organized crime, saw an increase in police seizures and overdose-linked deaths. This uptick, coupled with supply issues of other drugs, may have contributed to an increase in overdoses across Ontario and Canada.

Although Canada was seemingly not subject to the level of COVID-related frauds as experienced in other countries (such as medical supply fraud), organized crime did exploit the pandemic to facilitate some new frauds. For example, identity fraud, namely from fraudulent COVID-benefit claims related to the income supports introduced by the Government of Canada, were reported. Similarly, authorities in Ontario and Canada continue to report the use of false COVID-19 documents, such as fraudulent test results and vaccine certificates, by those aiming to circumvent public health measures. These fraudulent documents have become readily available online.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw significant reductions in overall crime in North America. Many major crime categories saw a decline in Ontario, including break and enter, homicides, and attempted murders. Although organized crime was also impacted by COVID-19, unlike other facets of crime, organized crime adapted to the restrictions and impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic faster.



STREET GANGS

A common distinction between street gangs and other forms of organized crime is that street gangs are often identified with specific communities or territories. Street gangs claim control of their respective communities or territories to engage in illegal and for-profit activity and violent behaviour. Historically, street gangs were most often active in urban settings; however, there has been a shift as street gangs in Ontario are expanding into other geographic areas and the digital environment. For instance, these groups are now more often found participating in criminal activity outside of their home turf, in other communities in Northern Ontario, Eastern Ontario, and Southwestern Ontario. Street gangs are increasingly becoming linked with criminals in other Ontario communities, other provinces, territories, and even other countries. Furthermore, street gang members often represent their specific community through social media and verbally attack rivals through these digital platforms. This form of behaviour triggers retaliatory online responses, leading to physical violence and shootings.

Another defining characteristic of street gangs is their demographic, as those associated with street gangs are comparatively younger than others involved in organized crime. Often, young adults (ages 18-21), and sometimes youth, comprise most of the street gangs' membership. Street gangs engage in criminal activities like other forms of organized crime – predominately drug and firearms trafficking, weapons offences, human trafficking, robberies, and homicides. Many of these criminal activities are facilitated by the fear and intimidation brought to suburban and rural towns by historically urban-based street gangs. In addition, on the rise over the past few years is street gangs' involvement with human trafficking – their expansion in this criminal activity is assisted by their expansion to other geographic areas. As street gangs' dominion expands across the province, their profit increases.

Resource Alert!

[Ontario's Guns, Gang and Violence Reduction Strategy](#)

[Public Safety Canada's Gang Prevention Strategy](#)

For example, a joint police investigation (Project Sunder) into the alleged street gang Eglinton West Crips resulted in the seizure of 31 firearms, seven kilograms of cocaine, two kilograms of fentanyl, two kilograms of crystal methamphetamine, and over \$300,000 in Canadian currency. The total street value of drugs and firearms seized was over \$1.6 million. This police investigation was in cooperation with 11 police agencies across the province and revealed that this street gang was involved in homicides, shootings, and drug and human trafficking throughout Ontario.



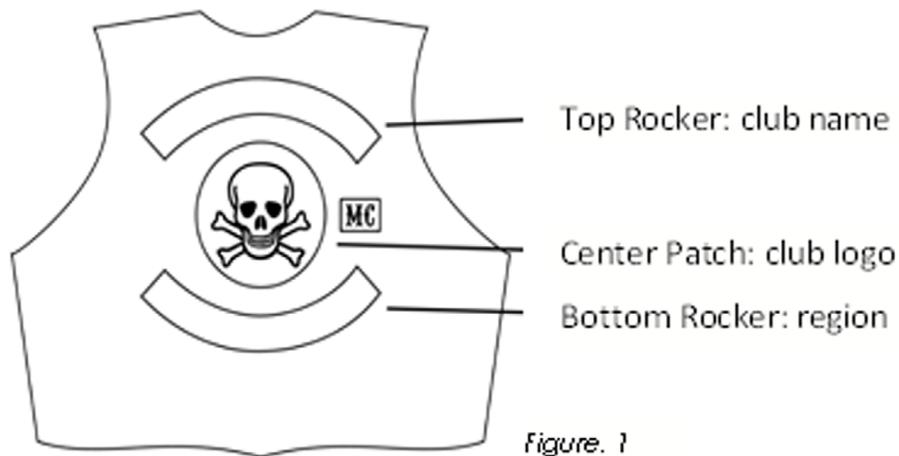
Although some street gangs are becoming more capable in their criminal activities and have expanded geographically in criminal operations, they continue to pose a significant public safety concern due to their blatant use of firearms and violence to conduct criminal activity.

Street gangs are continuing to work with other organized crime groups to expand their illegal operations into other areas of the province and are sometimes utilized to commit violent crimes as part of this partnership.

OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS

Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs (OMGs) are organized crime groups composed of motorcycle “enthusiasts” that participate in criminal activity for financial profits. OMGs sometimes refer to themselves as “one-percenters” or “1%ers”, referring to public statements made after the 1947 Hollister, California, riots that 99% of motorcycle riders were law-abiding citizens and not responsible for the irrational and criminal actions that occurred that summer. Members of OMGs identify themselves as members of a specific outlaw motorcycle club by wearing a symbol or emblem. In Ontario, a full-patch member of such a motorcycle club and a 1%er wears a three-piece patch vest (see Figure 1), known as “colours”. These colours openly assert their “outlaw” (i.e., non-law abiding) status.

OMGs are currently active in Ontario, including the 1% clubs and support clubs.



These motorcycle gangs are involved in all aspects of the illegal drug trade, from importation to production to distribution. This includes the importation and distribution of cocaine and the production and distribution of methamphetamine and fentanyl. It is not uncommon for motorcycle gangs to build coalitions with other crime groups when they can be in a position to profit from those relationships. Additionally, OMGs are engaged in intimidation, illegal gaming, prostitution, human trafficking, and money laundering. OMGs are known for their propensity for violence, and they continue to have conflicts with other rival clubs and other criminal groups operating in the province as they control criminal markets and territories.

The threat of violence will continue to be an increasing concern to the public. OMGs have taken on a lower profile, and it is recognized that 1% of gang members and their networks are now comfortable dropping their “colours” operating within boardrooms to operate business fronts that allow them to launder money while expanding their influence in mainstream business and civil society.

TRADITIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Traditional Organized Crime (TOC) groups are formal or informal groups whose members, and close associates’ ancestry trace back to a shared country of origin and are linked to a criminal network in that country of origin. Common examples of TOC groups include the ‘NDRANGHETA, LA COSA NOSTRA, CAMORRA, TRIADS, and DRUG CARTELS. TOC groups can also be traced to any part of the world with links to criminal networks in regions such as Europe, Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. Other characteristics of TOC groups include hierarchies, networks, and cells with a criminal enterprise structured for economic gain.

Historically, TOC groups engage in violence, intimidation, and extortion to exert control and/or influence over subjects, businesses, and rivals. This includes systematic corruption to gain trust, social acceptance, and legitimacy to increase its influence within the private and public sectors. Many of these groups are heavily involved in the illicit drug trade, illegal gaming, and money laundering. They have highly sophisticated networks, associations, and operations that enable them to profit from their criminal activities. Conflict among TOC groups continues to be a concern for law enforcement in Ontario as retaliation for targeted violence contributes to an ongoing cycle of violence. Through continued criminal activity and involvement, TOC groups perpetrate crime in Ontario, while undermining trust in our societal institutions, from real estate, to the stock market and law enforcement.

ILLEGAL FIREARMS

In Ontario, violence committed by illegal firearms has risen over the past five years. The increasing involvement of organized crime groups in the cross-border trafficking of illicit firearms is a paralleling trend. Available information suggests that over three-quarters of illicit handguns discovered in Ontario are from the United States and have come to Ontario through various smuggling networks, with varying levels of sophistication.

As such, organized crime operating in Ontario, in a region near the Canada-US border, is usually well-positioned to successfully coordinate, smuggle, and/or traffic illicit firearms onto the province's streets.



Also, of concern for Ontario police services is the continued use of 3D-printed firearms and firearm parts. The Criminal Code of Canada defines a “firearm” as a barreled weapon from which any shot, bullet, or other projectiles can be discharged, and that can cause serious bodily injury or death to a person. This definition also includes any frame or receiver of such a barreled weapon and anything that can be adapted for use as a firearm. All firearms in Canada, including 3D-printed firearms, are subject to the *Firearms Act* and associated regulations. Under current laws, the unlicensed manufacturing or possession of 3D-printed firearms is illegal. However, blueprints for 3D-printed gun parts are widely available online, and there have been illegal manufacturing operations of 3D-printed firearms in Canada. On-going advancements in 3D printing, simplification of domestic firearms assembly, and the relative ease of obtaining firearm kits/parts continue to impact public safety.

In other countries, measures have been introduced to control the production of these dangerous goods by making files that contain firearm blueprints illegal—Canada should examine such measures to prevent the trade of such goods. In Ontario, police services are increasingly uncovering so-called “ghost guns” or guns without serial numbers, in their investigations. Various techniques are being used by criminals in combination with genuine gun parts to produce a functioning but untraceable firearm.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on Ontario's illegal firearms trade. At the onset of the pandemic, illicit firearms, which comprise most of all crime guns in Ontario, may have experienced some supply issues around domestic thefts.

Although there is a strong likelihood that the illicit firearms trade in Ontario experienced some supply constraints due to COVID-19 public health measures, illegal gun supply accompanied by an increase in shootings increased in Ontario. While the reasons for this remain unknown, the increase of shootings could

ILLEGAL DRUGS

Illegal drugs represent the most significant and profitable criminal market for organized crime in Ontario. Organized crime has adopted various criminal roles throughout the illegal drug cycle: traffic, distribution, import, export, finance, and manufacture of illegal drugs. Further, many crime groups involved in the illegal drug trade may have recovered from initial setbacks due to COVID-19 restrictions and are likely moving operations back to pre-pandemic levels.

Nationally, there are some indications that the illegal drug market is expanding. For instance, the prevalence of past-year use of at least one of six illegal drugs was 15% (4.5 million), an increase from 13% (3.7 million) in 2015, which can be mainly attributed to cannabis and cocaine.ⁱ In addition, access to drugs has also become increasingly accessible via online sales, and major drug markets on the Dark Web are estimated to be worth \$315 million annually.ⁱⁱ

With significant profit margins, organized crime involvement in the illegal drug trade will undeniably persist and have a detrimental impact on public safety, economic prosperity, and the well-being of Ontarians. Despite their proven dangers, drug overdose deaths increased to a high of 2,235 in 2020ⁱⁱⁱ, with a substantial proportion linked to opioid abuse, which presents the most significant harm to the health of users. As such, Ontario law enforcement continues to be committed in combatting organized crime and its involvement in the illegal drug trade in Ontario and Canada.

Cocaine

Cocaine is not a domestic commodity in North America. Cocaine is made from the coca plant, grown mainly in South America. It is imported into several transit countries worldwide before making its way to those that consume it, including Canada. Although cocaine typically enters Ontario via land border crossings, law enforcement agencies note the drug has also been smuggled through air travel.

Over the past few decades, cocaine has remained the most prolific drug trafficked by organized crime in Ontario. Cocaine's historical dominance is believed to be primarily the profits and the consistent demand of the drug by its users. To meet this demand, organized crime in Ontario is largely involved in the trafficking and distribution of the drug. A smaller number of more sophisticated forms of organized crime are involved in the planning, financing, and importation of the drug, as these activities require significant resources and logistics.

Despite the challenges of operating in a COVID-19 environment, organized crime continues to engage in international cocaine importation into Canada. In July 2021, the Canada Border Services Agency and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police seized 87 kilograms of cocaine from planes originating from the Caribbean and destined for Ontario. As reported in the media, the investigation, Project Southam, was a joint effort by several domestic and international police agencies that led to the arrest of 22 individuals charged with 139 offences in total.^{iv}

Aside from smuggling operations, law enforcement officials are also concerned about the health effects of consuming cocaine and its derivatives. Prior to its packaging, cocaine is often supplemented or 'cut' with filling agents, which can reduce the drug's potency but increase its profitability. Traces of Fentanyl have also been found in cocaine and may be a consequence of cross-contamination. This combination of cocaine and fentanyl can have lethal side effects and, as such, is a pressing concern for law enforcement and health officials.



Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine is a synthetic stimulant made from chemical ingredients and comes in several forms, including powder, crystals, and tablets. It is commonly known as ice, meth, chalk, crank, and crystal meth. Methamphetamine is highly addictive, and high doses have been linked to fatal accidents, suicides, and violent aggression causing death.

Methamphetamine represents the largest quantity of amphetamine-type stimulants seized globally. Over the last five years, methamphetamine has become a national threat due to increasing use and availability. The quantities of methamphetamine seized in Canada have risen twelvefold from 2009 to 2019 and doubled between 2018 and 2019^v. In Ontario, large-scale methamphetamine smuggling attempts continue to be reported, including approximately 200 kilograms of methamphetamine seized at the Ambassador Bridge port of entry in Windsor in December 2019.

Clandestine methamphetamine labs are also well-documented in Ontario and Canada, which has contributed to significant environmental damage. Some estimates suggest that Canada produces 0.6% – 4.6% of the world's supply of amphetamine-type stimulants^{vi}. Depending on the production method, every kilogram of manufactured methamphetamine produces 6-to-10 kilograms of hazardous, toxic waste^{vii}. In one instance, a 2019 police investigation in York Region resulted in the seizure of more than 21,000 kg of toxic waste and 50 kg of methamphetamine worth \$5 million^{viii}.

Domestic production of methamphetamine is believed to have increased due to the lucrative profit margins of drug-production operations. Methamphetamine recipes can be easily found online, and many non-essential chemicals can be used interchangeably to produce methamphetamine.

Economic-based labs which are highly organized and can produce significant amounts of methamphetamine are a growing concern in Ontario. In April 2020, police dismantled a clandestine lab in Oshawa and seized 43 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine with a potential street value of over \$3.4 million.

Overall, there is an increased level of crime in communities where methamphetamine is prevalent. Such crimes are often committed in pursuit of funds to sustain consumption. Furthermore, the involvement of organized crime has also been linked to an increase in violence in communities where methamphetamine labs exist.^x



Opioids

The term “opioid” refers to all-natural, synthetic, or semi-synthetic chemicals that interact with opioid receptors in the body. Examples of synthetic opioids include fentanyl and its analogues, and other prescription pain medications, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and codeine. Natural opioids, also referred to as opiates, include substances such as opium and morphine. Semi-synthetic opioids such as heroin are derived from opiates and then synthesized into a compound.

There has been significant national and provincial focus regarding opioid use, specifically fentanyl. Fentanyl is estimated to be 80-100 times more potent than morphine and roughly 40 times more potent than heroin. Fentanyl is also odourless and tasteless and can be mixed with other drugs such as heroin, cocaine, benzodiazepines, caffeine, and other cutting agents like dimethyl sulphone. Increasingly, fentanyl is also found in counterfeit pills made to look like prescription opioids. As little as 2 milligrams of fentanyl can be lethal, and there is a very high risk of accidental overdose. Most recently, in Ontario, opioid-related deaths increased 60% between 2019 and 2020.

Additionally, fentanyl directly contributed to 87% of opioid-related deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly all regions in Ontario have reported an increase in opioid-related deaths, including regions in Northern Ontario, which has the highest rates of opioid-related deaths per population. ^{xi}

Fentanyl enters the illicit market from one of two sources: pharma-diverted or through illegal production. Pharma-diverted refers to pharmaceutically produced fentanyl patches or injection grades that are diverted from the medical stream to be sold on the black market. Illicitly produced fentanyl refers to the non-pharmaceutical version of the drug manufactured in illicit labs. It is believed that fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and its precursors are easily being purchased over the internet from China, India, Hong Kong, and Mexico. There are also indications that domestic illicit production of fentanyl has expanded in Canada. In 2021 British Columbia dismantled an illicit drug lab that was estimated to be capable of producing up to 26 kilograms — or 13 million fatal doses — of pure fentanyl every week. Similarly, nearly 1,500 kilograms of precursor chemicals were seized in July 2021 off Canada’s west coast, effectively preventing 2 billion doses of potential fentanyl from being produced.

Law enforcement and public health authorities are increasingly concerned about new and emerging synthetic opioids. Benzimidazole opioids such as etonitazene, isotonitazene, and metonitazene continue to be found in Ontario’s illicit drug supply which is concerning due to the potency of these drugs that can be similar or greater than fentanyl. Other synthetic opioids such as carfentanil, 10,000 times more potent than morphine, are also a serious public safety concern.

In all, there is strong indication to suggest that synthetic opioids, mainly fentanyl, have become a primary drug for many in organized crime. It is also very likely that criminal involvement of synthetic opioids, including production, smuggling, and trafficking, will continue to increase and consequently exacerbate the current opioid crisis in Ontario and Canada. As such, the immeasurable harm of fentanyl and opioids will impact both small and large cities and require significant resources for public health (e.g., harm reduction) and law enforcement (e.g., targeting suppliers and organized crime).



Cannabis

The Government of Canada legalized, regulated, and restricted access to cannabis in 2018 as part of a plan to reduce criminal involvement in the illicit cannabis market. The Government of Ontario initially issued 25 retail licenses for brick-and-mortar storefronts to sell recreational cannabis; the selection was based on strict requirements and a lottery system. However, due to the relatively low number of retail outlets and the high retail prices, the black market remained prevalent.

By April 2020, the Government of Ontario eliminated the lottery system and began issuing roughly 20 new permits per month to increase availability and combat unlicensed sales by black market dealers. The Government of Canada will be conducting a review of the current cannabis legislation in the fall of 2022. The purpose of this review is to determine the impact on public health, particularly young persons, Indigenous persons, and communities, and how the home cultivation of cannabis plants has changed. The result of the review will aid in identifying what is necessary to improve the way Canadians access and use cannabis moving forward.

It is believed that criminal activity has increased since the legalization of cannabis. Organized crime continues to exploit loopholes due to medical license misuse, pooling of licenses and authorizations to create large cannabis production sites, continued abuse of imposed limits by overgrowing cannabis plants by the thousands.

The absence of oversight regarding the inspection of production sites, transparency with law enforcement to share information of suspected criminal activity, monitoring doctor's prescription amounts, and a rigorous verification process for applicants have provided an opportunity for organized crime to abuse the legal cannabis market. Infiltration by criminals and criminal groups to produce illegal cannabis continues in Ontario.

By the direction of the Government of Canada, each province has created their own cannabis regime. Ontario settled on a hybrid mix of online and in-person shopping. The Ontario Cannabis Store is a crown corporation and is the only online retailer. Those shopping in person can visit privately run authorized retailers. The Alcohol and Gaming Commission is responsible for the regulation of all retail cannabis stores in Ontario. Despite best efforts to ensure that all retailers are compliant with the processes of selling cannabis, there are still instances of illegal retailers for in-person and online shopping.

Since the legalization of recreational cannabis, the federal and provincial governments have taken steps to ensure a secure cannabis supply for Canadians. Despite efforts to regulate safe and efficient access to recreational and medical cannabis products, organized crime has continued to infiltrate and profit from the production and sale of illegal cannabis. Illegal cannabis production is often perceived as a harmless crime, and as such, it continues to be a low-risk/high-profit commodity.

Additionally, correctional institutions in Canada have noted occurrences of 'drone drops' to smuggle illegal drugs and other contraband into facilities. Criminals may increasingly use drones for counter-surveillance and cross-border drug trafficking. Drone technology is expected to advance, allowing drones to travel greater distances, carry heavier loads, and become more affordable. Drones capable of carrying larger loads may perpetuate drug trafficking and smuggling. As organized crime continue to adopt evolving technologies, drone use in support of illegal drug activity may increase.

FRAUD

In 2020, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (CAFC) received 101,483 reports of fraud, amounting to approximately \$160 million in reported losses. More than 60,000 of these reports were submitted by Canadian consumers and businesses and accounted for over \$100 million in losses. Fewer than 5% of victims filed a fraud report with the CAFC. ^{xii}

Romance Scams

Romance scams accounted for \$18.5 million in financial losses, making it the top form of fraud affecting Canadians in 2020. ^{xiii} Criminals engaging in this type of fraud typically use fake social media and dating profiles to coerce their victims into having an online relationship to gain their trust and affection. Scammers then manufacture stories or situations in which their victims may wish to provide financial aid. Some stories include medical emergencies or family assistance and appear to be of an urgent nature. Other tactics involve luring victims to join a business venture or invest in cryptocurrency.

Canadians can reduce their risk of being victimized by romance scams by looking for warning signs. Scammers typically try to guilt their victims into sending money and often write with poor grammar and spelling. They usually have excuses not to meet in person and may even attempt to isolate their victims by discouraging them from discussing their online relationships with family and friends.

Investment Fraud

Investment scams accounted for \$16.5 million in financial losses, making it the second most frequent fraud affecting Canadians in 2020.^{xiv} In this type of fraud, criminals persuade their victims into investing in false or deceptive investment opportunities with the promise of higher-than-average returns. Common investment scams include fixed income, the pump and dump, franchise/business opportunities, as well as gem, Ponzi or pyramid scams.^{xv} Scammers utilize an array of deceptive tactics such as high-pressure sales, financial schemes offering high financial returns, and spear phishing.

Canadians can mitigate their risk of falling victim to these investment scams by verifying the individual's identity, their company website, and personal credentials and contacting the company using the phone number listed on their website. However, Canadians should also be mindful of phishing schemes involving fake websites that appear to look legitimate but contain false contact information, which may redirect them to the scammers themselves.

More information about the various types of fraud, and how to report fraud can be found on the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre [website](#).

Spear Phishing

Spear phishing accounted for \$14.4 million in financial losses, making it the third most impactful fraud affecting Canadians in 2020.^{xvi} Spear phishing is a type of cyberattack which involves criminals pretending to be legitimate entities such as banks, government agencies, or corporations. These cybercriminals scour social media for information about their intended target. Doing so allows them to craft personalized emails which often look authentic and credible. Another common tactic involves spoofing—the act of falsely displaying a trusted email address as the source of a message—and attempting to lure victims into clicking on malicious links or opening attachments containing malware. The result is a compromised system or network and the potential loss of money, login credentials, intellectual property, and other sensitive information.

Businesses can take steps to protect themselves from falling victim to spear-phishing attacks by providing adequate training opportunities to employees and developing effective security awareness policies. Employees should scrutinize invoices as scammers are known to use the names of legitimate businesses and corporations to appear credible. Verifying the sender of an email before opening any attachments can greatly reduce the risk of suffering financial losses due to spear-phishing attacks. Lastly, businesses should be mindful of the information they publish on social media platforms, as criminals often use this information to give their phishing emails an authentic look and feel.

Extortion

Extortion accounted for \$12.5 million in financial losses, making it the fourth most impactful fraud affecting Canadians in 2020.^{xvii} In 2020, Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre received 17,390 complaints about extortion. Today, there are many types of extortion scams. One of the most common extortion scams is the Canada Revenue Agency Scam: Scammers claim to be Canada Revenue Agency employees and attempt to persuade their victims into making payments to settle outstanding income tax balances. They often intimidate their victims by suggesting they might be fined, arrested, or deported if they do not cooperate. Payments are typically requested in cryptocurrency or prepaid gift cards.

In 2020, Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre received over 100,000 reports of fraud resulting in significant financial losses to Canadians and Canadian businesses. Criminals, scammers, and blackmailers continue to use intimidation and high-pressure sales tactics to coerce their victims. Individuals and businesses can take a few steps to mitigate the risk of falling victim to various types of fraud. Some countermeasures include (but are not limited to): refusing to provide personal and sensitive information such as your name, address, birth date, Social Insurance Number, and credit card or banking details; requesting information in writing if a caller claims to be a government employee; verifying the caller and his/her organization; and, protecting your computer from malware and other viruses.

Fraudsters are also known to play on their victims' emotions and manufacture situations that appear urgent to coerce their victims into providing some form of payment (e.g., Bitcoin and pre-paid gift cards). Do not be afraid to say "no" or ask for a phone number that can be used to contact the caller's organization.

Alert!

Lower your risk of being a victim of identity theft! Use strong passwords for online accounts containing personal or sensitive information (e.g., social media accounts and online banking). A strong password contains a minimum of eight characters, including upper- and lower-case letters, and at least one number and one special character. Enable two-factor authentication for an additional layer of protection.

CYBERCRIME

For legitimate businesses, the internet has provided broader capabilities and opportunities to many of their activities, amplifying the speed, ease, and range with which many financial transactions can be conducted. However, the continuing growth of the technology offers enormous new prospects for illicit activities, such as social and privacy intrusion, identity theft, financial crimes, fraud, and numerous other criminal acts that may have a direct impact on personal and community safety.

Malware

Malware is any software designed with the intent to exploit or cause harm to other software or hardware, including small and large networks, single workstations such as laptops or desktops, and smartphones. Common types of malware include viruses, trojans, spyware, keyloggers, worms, ransomware, adware, rootkits, cryptominers, and logic bombs. ^{xviii}

State and non-state-sponsored cybercriminals have been known to use malware to facilitate data theft by gaining unauthorized access to networks and systems housing sensitive information. Other motives include cyberwarfare, extortion, financial gain, and espionage. State-sponsored cybercriminals are also suspected of being involved in disruption activities: In November 2020, the Communications Security Establishment reported foreign state-sponsored cybercriminals may be developing additional cyber capabilities to target Canada's supply of electricity. ^{xix}

Adopting a security awareness mindset is key to mitigating the risk of inadvertently infecting a workstation or network with malware. Preventative measures such as acquiring a reliable Ad Blocker and anti-malware software can significantly reduce the risk of infection. Ensuring all systems and software are updated with the latest security patches has also been a proven way of preventing infection by malware variants designed to exploit security vulnerabilities.



Ransomware

Ransomware is a type of malware designed to infiltrate a network and restrict a user's access to information by encrypting its contents until a ransom is paid, usually via cryptocurrency such as bitcoin. Ransomware is one of the most disruptive types of cyber attacks and is most often deployed using malware such as trojans and worms specifically designed to grant criminals backdoor access to vulnerable systems. Common tactics used by cybercriminals to extort their victims include data theft of intellectual property and encryption of sensitive information. Ransom demands vary greatly depending on the target and the value of the hijacked information and can range from hundreds to millions of dollars.

Targeted ransomware attacks appear to be increasing in frequency and sophistication, leading to significantly higher demands, greater financial losses, and lasting damage to victims. Cybercriminals are known to advertise their access to various organizations to other underground cybercriminals with the intent to coordinate ransomware attacks tailored to specific private and public sector organizations. Such targeted attacks may be capable of penetrating deeper into sensitive systems housing intellectual property, thereby putting these organizations at greater risk of extortion. Cybercriminals have also targeted average citizens' personal computers using similar tactics to extort their victims.

Reviewing threat preparedness strategies and policies, as well as assessing employee awareness and providing on-going training opportunities are effective countermeasures to ransomware attacks. Developing a robust crisis management and communications plan may greatly assist employees during a ransomware attack by providing a structured plan to identify, nullify, and contain the attack.



Phishing

Phishing is a type of cyber attack which involves criminals sending an email or text messages, sometimes specifically tailored to a victim, purporting to be a credible bank, government agency, or corporation. Victims are typically lured into providing login credentials, credit card details, and other sensitive information. Common lures include providing login credentials to regain access to a locked bank account, inputting a social insurance number to receive a tax refund, or providing credit card details to accept a reimbursement for a product or service. Criminals may also contact individuals by phone or use social media to lure a victim into clicking on a malicious link or downloading malware.

Phishing appears to be the most common attack vector used by criminals to facilitate cyberattacks, resulting in mass collection of personal information, stolen intellectual property, and significant financial losses for victims. Current data indicate phishing attacks cost corporations approximately \$2.8 million in losses.^{xx} The advent of work-from-home arrangements resulting from the COVID-19 health pandemic may have incentivized criminals to adapt their phishing strategies to target individuals working remotely on unsecured networks. Increased adoption of cloud services and virtual collaboration tools may have also contributed to a rise in phishing attacks.

Incorporating anti-phishing software and security awareness best practices can significantly reduce an attack surface and minimize the risk of suffering a data breach resulting in significant financial losses. Educating employees to identify warning signs and providing ongoing security awareness training can help reduce risk. Verifying email attachments before opening them and applying software updates and patches in a timely fashion are also effective countermeasures.

Alert!

Cyber attacks are on the rise. Targets for such attacks are not limited to large private and public sector organizations—everyday citizens are also at risk. Adopt a healthy security awareness mindset to protect your personal information by use of an encrypted password management tool to secure strong passwords; enable two-factor authentication for highly sensitive accounts such as banking; procure reputable anti-virus and anti-malware software solutions and ensure all software updates and security patches are applied in a timely

MONEY LAUNDERING

Money laundering is the process of making illegally gained proceeds (i.e., “dirty”) appear legal (i.e., “clean”). Typically, it involves three steps: placement, layering, and integration. First, the illegitimate funds are deceitfully introduced into the legitimate financial system. The money is then moved around to create confusion, sometimes by wiring or transferring through numerous accounts. Finally, the money is integrated into the financial system through additional transactions until the “dirty money” appears “clean.” Money laundering can facilitate crimes such as drug trafficking, firearms trafficking, human trafficking, and terrorism and can adversely impact the global economy. Large-scale money laundering by sophisticated organized crime negatively impacts the integrity of financial services, democratic control of various sectors, the value of goods and services, and national and government reputations. ^{xxi}

One of the most sophisticated money laundering operations is trade-based money laundering. In this operation, illicit funds are concealed and cleaned through complicated high-volume trade transactions of goods and payments. The trade-based process requires professionals with specialized skills from sectors such as finance, trading, banking, and law.

Real estate purchases are another method used by organized crime. Based on studies by Global Financial Integrity, from 2015-2020, Canada has found almost a billion dollars (\$822.7 million CAD) worth of laundered real estate. ^{xxii} Some purchasers conceal their real identity by using shell companies, trusts, and nominees. In these instances, organized crime has utilized professionals such as real estate lawyers to facilitate the transactions of real estate purchases.

In most jurisdictions, the most common money laundering method is through legitimate cash-intensive businesses, such as restaurants, bars, and convenience stores. Criminals use this method to create cash-intensive businesses where a large portion of revenue is received in cash. Through these businesses, criminals can deposit criminally obtained cash into business accounts, effectively generating cash revenue from legitimate sources and illicit income.

Casinos are often utilized by criminals to launder their illicit funds. Although not as sophisticated as trade-based money laundering, large amounts of illicit funds can easily be laundered. Criminals buy casino chips using illicit money, engage in minimal play, and cash out the chips for a casino-issued cheque. The Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario and the Ontario Provincial Police are responsible for regulating and enforcing the province’s gaming industry.

Cryptocurrencies are another method that enables criminals to launder illicit funds. It has developed a reputation for being the commodity of choice for money launderers and criminals over the years due to its anonymous transactions.

In addition to federal legislation, Ontario’s anti-money laundering efforts are related to regulations on data collection and information sharing on business ownership records and real estate transactions.



CRYPTOCURRENCY

Cryptocurrencies are virtual currency that works as a medium of exchange using cryptography to secure financial transactions. Though Canada allows the use of virtual currencies, including cryptocurrencies, they are not considered legal tender in Canada and generally operate independently of a central bank, central authority, or government.

Canada's tax laws and rules, including the Income Tax Act, also apply to cryptocurrency transactions. The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has characterized cryptocurrency as a commodity and maintains that the use of cryptocurrency to pay for goods or services should be treated as a barter transaction. In addition, every cryptocurrency business or dealer in virtual currency operating in Canada or providing services to the Canadian market must register with the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC) and comply with applicable regulations.

Through its decentralized administration, cryptocurrency's instant transactions, portability, and international reach mean it can be used as a tool for the furtherance of tax avoidance and money-laundering. Cryptocurrencies are also attractive to criminals because they allow for anonymity and place transactions beyond the reach of normal government regulation. Between 2017 and 2020, cryptocurrency fraud in Canada increased by over 400 percent.^{xxiii} Growing public interest and the potential wide adoption of cryptocurrencies may encourage organized crime to use cryptocurrencies to engage in fraud, scams, and money laundering activities. More information on cryptocurrencies can be found on the Canada Revenue Agencies' website.

ILLEGAL SPORTS BETTING

This year we saw the legalization of single-event sports betting in Canada. Previously only parlay betting (picking multiple events on a single ticket) was sanctioned, which meant that bettors had to use illegal bookmakers and/or offshore online gambling platforms to bet on single events. Though the introduction of single event betting is expected to result in increased legal betting by the public, it is expected that organized crime is still positioned to make money from illegal, unregulated bets. They can achieve this by offering their clients two key things: better odds and higher levels of credit than legal gambling venues can offer. Organized crime profits significantly from loan sharking by charging exorbitant levels of interest from their gambling customers, also known as loansharking.

The soon-to-be growing market for legal online betting will also provide organized crime with an additional venue to launder its proceeds of crime. It can achieve this using various accounts and electronic gaming platforms to place significant amounts of money on both teams in a single sporting event. This will ensure that minimal money is lost regardless of the game's result while at the same time gaining a seemingly legitimate source of income made.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Since human trafficking was first identified as a prevalent issue and enforcement focus in Ontario, it has continued to grow into a highly profitable crime. Victims are recruited and forced into a wide range of economic sectors, most commonly the sex trade, agricultural work, construction, and domestic servitude. In some instances, victims are also coerced and or forced into the removal of organs and involuntary marriage.

To address human trafficking, the provincial government passed new legislation, the *Combating Human Trafficking Act, 2021*. This act aims to enhance the province's commitment in responding to and providing support to victims and survivors of human trafficking. In addition, a further two new acts; the *Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy Act, 2021* and the *Accommodation Sector Registration of Guests Act, 2021*, will provide a comprehensive plan to combat this issue, including education and training to law enforcement officials that respond to these crimes. The creation of these acts, along with amendments to current legislation, builds upon the province's \$307-million Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy.

Resource Alert!

Ontario's Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy 2020-2025

[Public Safety Canada: Support for Victims and Survivors](#)

srvvrs-en.aspx

Human trafficking continues to be one of the most profitable criminal acts perpetrated by organized crime. Due to its clandestine nature and the fact that many victims are reluctant to come forward, human trafficking remains low risk with a high reward for organized crime to exploit. Many of the components of human trafficking occur out of the public eye proving difficult for law enforcement bodies to detect. By exploiting avenues detailed below, traffickers can conduct activities generally unobserved:

- Hotels, motels, and short-term rentals, and transient accommodations for sex trafficking
- Migrant workers housed together without community contact
- Domestic workers isolated by nature of work in private settings/residences

As a result, victims are coerced by violence, threats, and intimidation, along with the withholding of legal documents. These factors contribute to the ability for organized crime to successfully traffic humans, especially women and young girls.

In Canada, Ontario is considered a hub for human trafficking activity. Trans Canada and 400 series highways are key pipelines for trafficking movement, allowing traffickers to quickly move victims between cities and towns across Ontario and throughout Canada. Traffickers often use highways 11 and 17 to move victims through Northern Ontario. The low population density and relative remoteness of these highways and rural communities benefit the efforts of traffickers to avoid detection. Traffickers often utilize these corridors to strategically maximize their profits, maintain physiological control over their victims, and avoid detection by law enforcement. Human trafficking also occurs within local communities, and a victim may be forced or manipulated into an exploitative situation without ever leaving the town or home they live in. A crime group may generate enough profit and have an established clientele base in their neighborhood, allowing them to never have to move a victim from city to city.



VEHICLES AND CONVEYANCES

The importation of illicit goods via the Canada/US border is a key facilitator of organized crime throughout Ontario. Drugs are both imported into Canada and exported from Canada, mainly from/to the US and other countries. Smugglers also import illegal firearms from the US. The flow of these illicit goods has been a longstanding issue, and organized crime has utilized the various modes of transportation (land, air, and water) to facilitate these markets.

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies are aware that organized crime groups (OCG) leverage their connections within the commercial trucking industry to facilitate drug importation and human smuggling operations at numerous Canada-US borders. In September 2017, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officers found three women and nine children inside a transport truck attempting to cross the Ambassador Bridge border connecting Windsor, ON, and Detroit, USA. The women and children were allegedly being smuggled into Canada.^{xxiv} In March 2021, CBSA officers conducted a secondary search of a commercial truck at an unnamed border crossing in the Pacific Highway District and discovered 71.5 kilograms of cocaine concealed within the trailer. The street value of the seizure was estimated to be roughly \$3.5 million dollars.^{xxv} In June 2021, law enforcement officers discovered a group of smugglers may have used tractor-trailers to import up to 100 kilograms of drugs from Mexico and California to Ontario via various border crossings. Investigators noted the methods used to conceal the drugs were so sophisticated that x-ray scanners were unable to penetrate the hydraulic-powered trap door compartments housed within the trailers.^{xxvi}

Transnational organized crime groups have historically exploited commercial air travel to facilitate the movement of illicit goods. Today, this can be done in the form of individual passengers carrying small amounts of illicit goods via passenger planes – often direct flights from source countries in South America and the Caribbean. Similarly, organized crime groups have also been known to compromise airport personnel to better facilitate the flow of illicit goods through airports and flights. In 2019, an RCMP investigation named OWOODCRAFT dismantled a drug ring importing various drugs through Toronto Pearson International Airport with the help of two airline employees. Organized crime has also utilized private aircrafts, such as helicopters, to move illicit goods across the Canada/US border due to the porous nature of the border.

Methods of importing and exporting illicit goods via air are similar to those used over water. The various lakes connecting North Eastern United States to Ontario are commonly utilized by crime groups to smuggle goods across the border.

The importation of illicit commodities into Canada is of great concern to law enforcement officials. These activities do not only impact individuals at border crossings—Canadians across the country are also at risk. OCGs use the proceeds of international smuggling operations to further their criminal enterprises, expand the scope of their activities, and exert control over the communities in which they operate. Members of such crime syndicates often have a propensity for violence and can endanger the lives of innocent bystanders, especially during conflicts with rival groups. Law enforcement officers must continue to work with the general public to mitigate the risks to the community and public safety.

Alert!

Activities such as drug and firearm smuggling, as well as human trafficking, pose significant public safety risks to the communities we serve and protect.

Public assistance in addressing these social aisles helps keep our communities safe. The public is requested to immediately report suspicious border activity to the Canadian Border Services Agency by calling 1-888-502-9060 toll-free or [online](#).

Within the province, the public can also assist by contacting their local police service or, if you wish to remain anonymous, via Crime Stoppers by calling 1-800-222-TIPS(8477) toll-free or [online](#).

Provide as much detail as possible, including the name, approximate age, and physical description of the individual(s); the suspicious activity you observed; the date and time the activity took place; the approximate location; and the method of transportation (e.g. car, boat, airplane, train).

Smuggling activities such as drug and firearms smuggling and human trafficking pose significant public safety risks to the communities we serve and protect. Immediately report suspicious border activity to CBSA by calling 1-888-502-9060 toll-free. Provide as much detail as possible, including: the name, approximate age, and physical description of the individual(s); the suspicious activity you observed; the date and time the activity took place; the approximate location; and the method of transportation (e.g., car, boat, airplane, train). Canadians are also encouraged to use the [Online Tip Submission](#) portal to report such activities.

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