



Edmonton · Video

Edmonton mom seeks justice after daughter's fatal fentanyl overdose

Cassidy Lafleche, 25, died of a fentanyl-related overdose in October



Andrea Huncar · CBC News · Posted: Nov 16, 2018 6:00 AM MST | Last Updated: November 16, 2018



Edmonton police are investigating the sudden death of Cassidy Lafleche. (Carolyn Lafleche)

Hours after Cassidy LaFleche left the west Edmonton townhouse where she lived with her family, she was dead from a fentanyl overdose.

Later on that October morning, a police officer with kind eyes broke the news to her mom.

"I just lost it, I couldn't believe it and my world fell apart," said Carolyn Lafleche, a member of Alexander First Nation who has long lived in Edmonton.

- ['Poisoned' street drugs trend frightening, says manager of safe injection site](#)

Lafleche finds it hard to believe her 25-year-old daughter would have knowingly taken the fentanyl that killed her last month. She thinks Cassidy took another drug laced with the deadly opioid.

"Those drug dealers should be charged," said Lafleche. "I bet they don't even realize my daughter died. And they continue to sell this drug. It has to stop before more kids lose their lives."

"If I could prevent another mother's heartbreak, I'd do it in a heartbeat."

"If I could prevent another mother's heartbreak, I'd do it in a heartbeat"

- Carolyn Lafleche

This one mother's heartbreak, her frustration, comes as the police and courts appear to be taking a harder line against dealers who sell fentanyl, an opioid that has killed 1,345 Albertans in the past 32 months.

A report released by the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre (AFNIGC) and the Alberta government in November 2017 found the rate of opioid-related deaths among First Nations Albertans was three times higher than for non-Indigenous people.

"Children are left without mothers and parents, and it just is devastation to a nation that loves and cares about their family members," said Bonnie Healy, executive director of AFNIGC.

- [Rate of opioid overdose deaths 3 times higher among Indigenous Albertans](#)



- [Drug dealers banned from Blood reserve still know when and how to strike](#)

Healy is a registered nurse from the Kainai First Nation in southern Alberta, where the opioid epidemic has hit especially hard.

"Opioid use is just a systemic outcome of unresolved trauma, and trauma didn't just happen from residential school, it happened from time of contact," she said.



Carolyn Lafleche says she hopes to see criminal charges laid against the person who sold her daughter Cassidy, 25, the fentanyl that killed her.

At Lafleche's home this week, family and friends flipped through photo albums that document two decades worth of happier times: Cassidy as a little girl competing in her jingle dress; Cassidy posing for her first modelling contract; Cassidy's smile beaming out from family photos with her sister and younger brothers.

Large white dream catchers hang in the living room where Lafleche and her supporters shared nightmarish stories about families from their community. They spoke about those who lost their children in drug-related deaths and the ones who worry their kids might be next.

"We don't want any more of these young people dying," said Lafleche. "A lot of people want to sweep it under the rug. It's not going to go away."

“We don't want any more of these young people dying. A lot of people want to sweep it under the rug. It's not going to go away.”

- Carolyn Lafleche

It's a tragedy the Lafleche family might have avoided, if not for the events of 2012. That's when Cassidy was sexually assaulted and the once bubbly and outgoing teenager first turned to drugs, her mom said.

Last year, Lafleche said she and Cassidy's father managed to get a court order to have their daughter admitted to Alberta Hospital. After months of treatment she appeared to be on the right track. Then in July, Cassidy's grandmother, who she was close to, died of cancer.

Cassidy's cheeks hollowed out and she began acting more aggressively. The demons were back, she was hooked on methamphetamine again.

Barriers to services

As she sought help for her daughter, Lafleche said she repeatedly encountered roadblocks: health-care workers who failed to see the gravity of Cassidy's situation; the inability to access services for an adult daughter who wasn't in the right state of mind to do it herself; or Cassidy's paranoia that made it difficult to travel to a counselling session by taxi or bus.

In between 12-hour night shifts, Lafleche tried to schedule appointments and keep a close eye on her daughter. Sometimes, when Cassidy seemed especially anxious, Lafleche took the Wi-Fi cord with her to work, so her daughter couldn't buy drugs on Facebook.

Better support systems for the parents of drug users would make a big difference, she said. "This way, us parents wouldn't feel so alone trying to help our children."

- [Families affected by opioid crisis need more support, Alberta prof says](#)

On Oct. 28, dressed in a black hoodie, Cassidy and a friend headed out for the evening.

What Lafleche has since learned suggests her daughter stopped at two houses that night near 95th Street and 115th Avenue, before returning to her friend's place. At 5 a.m. officers found her without a pulse. Edmonton police are investigating her death.

Popular Now in News

1 [B.C. judge sentences man to 1 year in jail for contempt of court](#)

47 reading now

2 [New ruling reveals only a third of](#)

Upcoming manslaughter trials

Since 2016, city police have laid three manslaughter charges in separate cases related to fentanyl overdoses. Two cases are scheduled to go to trial next year, while the charge in the third case has been stayed.

Another charge of manslaughter in an overdose death in Edson was stayed; the accused is now awaiting sentencing on trafficking charges.

- [How strict should fentanyl penalties be? Case of prison possession causes courtroom debate](#)
- [Bail granted for man charged with manslaughter in fentanyl death](#)
- ['If you're dealing fentanyl, you're dealing death': B.C. considers tougher penalties for fentanyl dealers](#)

Edmonton criminal defence lawyer Lionel Chartrand said a manslaughter charge in most cases would be difficult to prove. The prosecutor has to show that a reasonable person would foresee the risk of bodily harm as a result of trafficking fentanyl, he said.

He described possible scenarios, such as a dealer who knows the person they are selling to has a history of overdosing, or helps a buyer who is already intoxicated consume more by, for instance, injecting them.

"It would have to be, in my view, more than just a simple sale," said Chartrand. "But that remains to be seen. Some courts may rule that with the present day knowledge of the number of deaths, that a reasonable person would foresee that."



Defence lawyer Lionel Chartrand says prosecution departments ask for much more serious penalties, and the courts are hiking jail sentences for fentanyl. (Nathan Gross/CBC)

In general, said Chartrand, prosecution departments are asking for more serious penalties, and the courts are hiking jail sentences for the trafficking of fentanyl because of its increased danger compared to other drugs. But he disputes that it's an effective deterrent, pointing out that dealers are often struggling with the same issues of mental health, poverty or addiction.

"Generally, they're not going to think, 'Well, I might get seven years instead of three, so I'm not going to do this,'" said Chartrand.

In August, Native Friendship Centres in Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Calgary and Lethbridge received a \$400,000 provincial grant [to provide culturally sensitive services](#) for treatment and harm reduction.

It's part of a \$5 million investment by the province to help Indigenous communities address the opioid crisis.

At the federal level, Indigenous Services Canada said it has invested more than \$350 million this year, on and off reserves, for culturally relevant mental health and prevention and treatment services for addiction.

- [Edmonton's 4th safe injection site opens in McCauley](#)

In a statement, Alberta Health Services expressed condolences to the Lafleche family and said it has focused on reducing the harmful effects of addiction by improving access to treatment and expanding programs such as the opening of safe consumption sites.

"Even with the variety of treatment options available, we understand there can be frustration when navigating the system, and it can be challenging to get your loved one the help they need," AHS officials wrote. "It can be challenging to assist individuals who have problems with substances, because as adults they can make their own decisions about use."



120,000 striking PSAC members voted for the work stoppage

37 reading now

3 Trudeau blasts Poilievre at Volkswagen plant announcement

31 reading now

4 Here's what we know — and don't — about the \$20M heist at Pearson airport

31 reading now

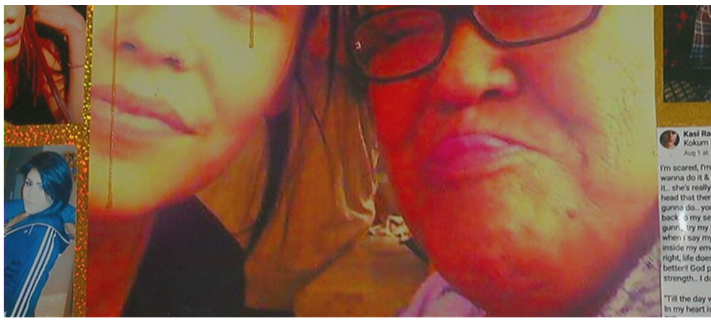
5 House Republicans, Manhattan district attorney's office reach deal over Trump inquiry

4 Here's what we know — and don't — about the \$20M heist at Pearson airport

31 reading now

5 House Republicans, Manhattan district attorney's office reach deal over Trump inquiry

20 reading now



Cassidy Lafleche had a close relationship with her kokum who died in July. (Carolyn Lafleche)

andrea.huncar@cbc.ca
[@andeahuncar](https://twitter.com/andeahuncar)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



[Andrea Huncar](#)

Reporter

Andrea Huncar reports on human rights and justice. Contact her in confidence at andrea.huncar@cbc.ca

- [Follow Andrea Huncar on Twitter](#)
- [More by Andrea Huncar](#)

[CBC's Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) | [About CBC News](#)

[Corrections and clarifications](#) | [Submit a news tip](#) | [Report error](#) ▼

RELATED STORIES

- [Alberta looks for 'outside the box' solutions to battle opioid crisis](#)
- ['Poisoned' street drugs trend frightening, says manager of safe injection site](#)
- [Families affected by opioid crisis need more support, Alberta prof says](#)

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU



B.C. judge sentences man to 1 year in jail for contempt of court

News - Canada - British Columbia



Here's what we know — and don't — about the \$20M heist at Pearson airport

News - Canada - Toronto



New ruling reveals only a third of 120,000 striking PSAC members voted for the work stoppage

Kate McKenna
News - Politics



Montana Republicans won't let this trans lawmaker speak in the legislature

Sheena Goodyear
Radio - As It Happens



Trudeau blasts Poilievre at Volkswagen plant announcement

John Paul Tasker
News - Politics

DISCOVER MORE FROM CBC



LISTEN
Temple Grandin says the education system isn't making space for visual thinkers like her

Radio - The Sunday Magazine



New ruling reveals only a third of 120,000 striking PSAC members voted for the work stoppage

Kate McKenna
News - Politics



A short history of airport gold heists (because Toronto's isn't the first)

News - World



UPDATED
McDavid's 2 goals not enough as Oilers fall to Kings in OT, trail series 2-1

Donna Spencer
Sports - Hockey - NHL

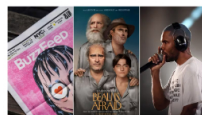


LISTEN
Still seeking your soul mate? 'One' is a whole number, says psychologist

Radio - Tapestry



OPINION
Joy Drop: Eid Mubarek to everyone!



GROUP CHAT
Remembering BuzzFeed News, and why you can't



VW CEO says EV battery plant planned for Ontario could become one of the world's largest



Q WITH TOM POWER
Mae Martin on SAP, and why teenagers are right to



French court finds Hassan Diab guilty of involvement in 1980 bombing

Shireen Ahmed
Sports

**compare Frank Ocean to
Beyoncé**

Arts - Commotion

world's largest

Kate Dubinski

News - Canada - London

be angry

Arts - Q

Richard Raycraft

News - Politics

My Account

[Profile](#)
[CBC Gem](#)
[Newsletters](#)
[About CBC Accounts](#)

Connect with CBC

[Facebook](#)
[Twitter](#)
[YouTube](#)
[Instagram](#)
[Mobile](#)
[RSS](#)
[Podcasts](#)

Contact CBC

[Submit Feedback](#)
[Help Centre](#)

Audience Relations, CBC
P.O. Box 500 Station A
Toronto, ON
Canada, M5W 1E6

Toll-free (Canada only):
1-866-306-4636

About CBC

[Corporate Info](#)
[Sitemap](#)
[Reuse & Permission](#)
[Terms of Use](#)
[Privacy](#)
[Jobs](#)
[Our Unions](#)
[Independent Producers](#)
[Political Ads Registry](#)
[AdChoices](#)

Services

[Ombudsman](#)
[Corrections and Clarifications](#)
[Public Appearances](#)
[Commercial Services](#)
[CBC Shop](#)
[Doing Business with Us](#)
[Renting Facilities](#)
[Radio Canada International](#)
[CBC Lite](#)

Accessibility

It is a priority for CBC to create products that are accessible to all in Canada including people with visual, hearing, motor and cognitive challenges.

Closed Captioning and Described Video is available for many CBC shows offered on [CBC Gem](#).

[About CBC Accessibility](#)
[Accessibility Feedback](#)