

# Alberta's Opioid Crisis: Any Person, any Place, any Time?

Amanda Barberio and Brian Ladd

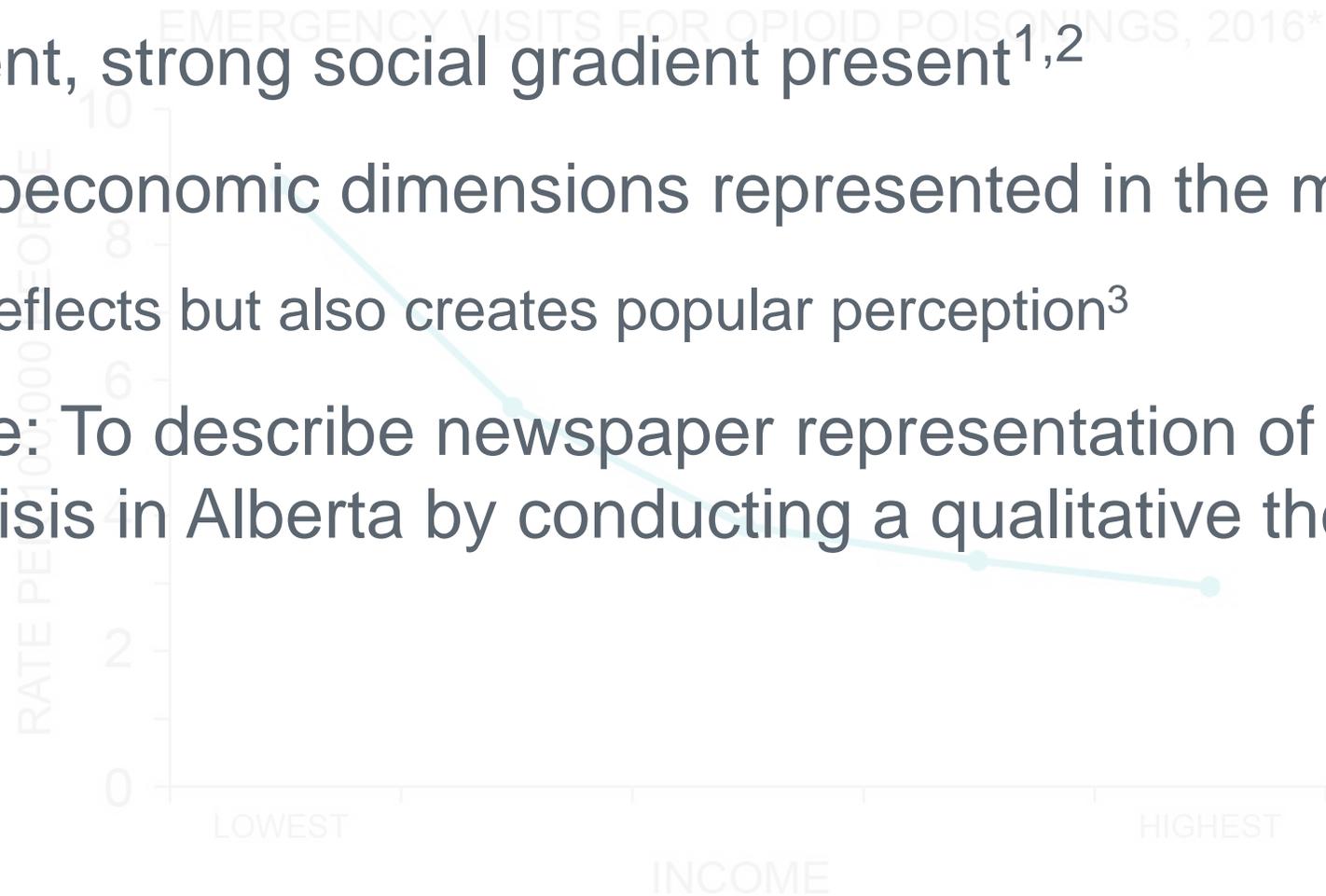
Healthy Public Policy Unit – Alberta Health Services (AHS)

Canadian Public Health Association Conference

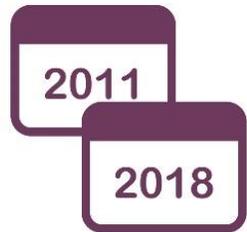
April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019

## Background / Rationale

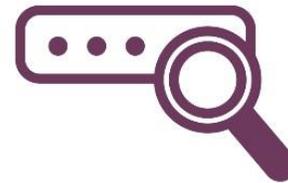
- Consistent, strong social gradient present<sup>1,2</sup>
- Are socioeconomic dimensions represented in the media?
  - Media reflects but also creates popular perception<sup>3</sup>
- Objective: To describe newspaper representation of the opioid crisis in Alberta by conducting a qualitative thematic analysis



# Methods



January 2011 to May 2018



Keyword / phrase search



16 newspapers from 10 cities/towns across Alberta



707 articles found, 634 after duplicates were removed

# Methods

## Risk

What is the risk of danger, harm or death due to opioids in a population?

# Methods

## Risk

What are the risks of danger due to opioids in a population?

## Causes

What are the perceived drivers of the opioids crisis?

# Methods

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What are the risks of danger due to opioids in a population?

## Causes

What are the perceived drivers of the opioids crisis?

## Solutions

What actions to combat the opioid crisis are being implemented or proposed?

# Methods

## Risk

What are the risks of danger due to opioids in a population?

## Law Enforcement

How are accounts of arrests, seizures, charges and sentencing described?

## Causes

What are the perceived drivers of the opioids crisis?

## Solutions

What are the proposed or evolving actions to combat the opioids crisis?

# Methods

## Risk

What are the risks of danger due to opioids in a population?

## Statistics

What is the magnitude of the crisis and/or are more people affected over time?

measures, charges, and

## Causes

What are the perceived drivers of the opioids crisis?

## Solutions

What are the proposed or evolving actions to combat the opioids crisis?

# Methods

## Risk

What are the risks of danger due to opioids in a population?

## Personal Stories

How are individuals who have experienced harms related to opioid use or addiction being portrayed?

zures, charges, and

## Causes

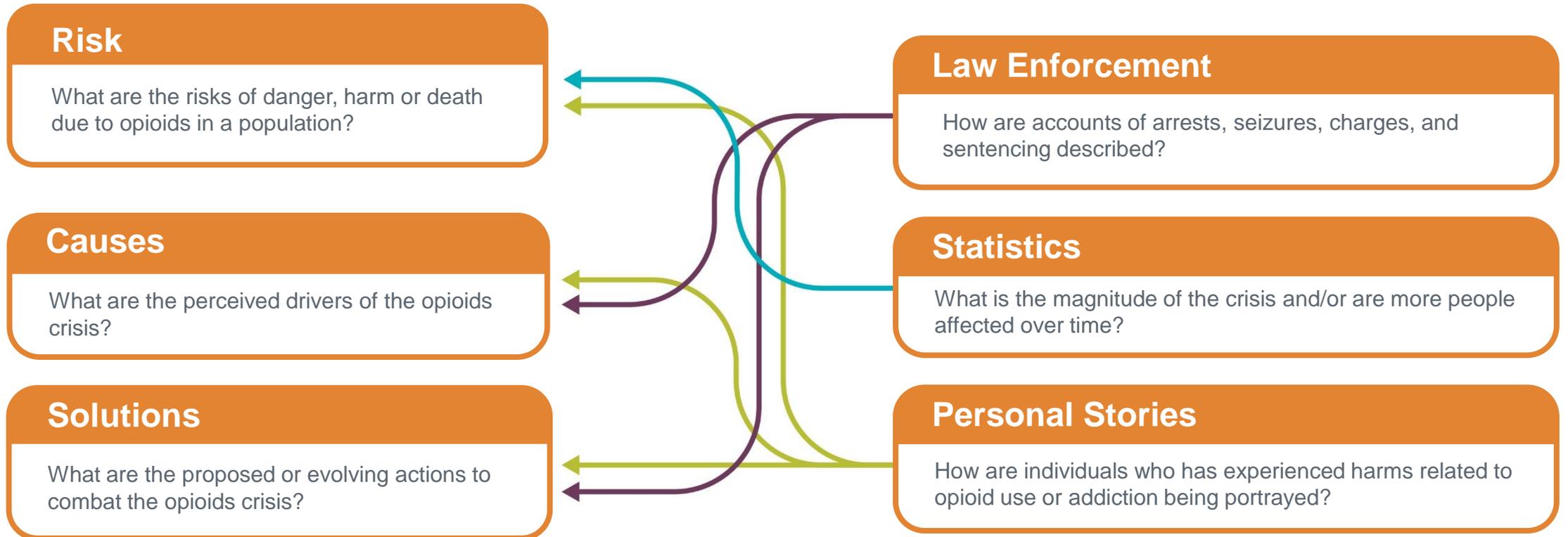
What are the perceived drivers of the crisis?

s and/or are more people

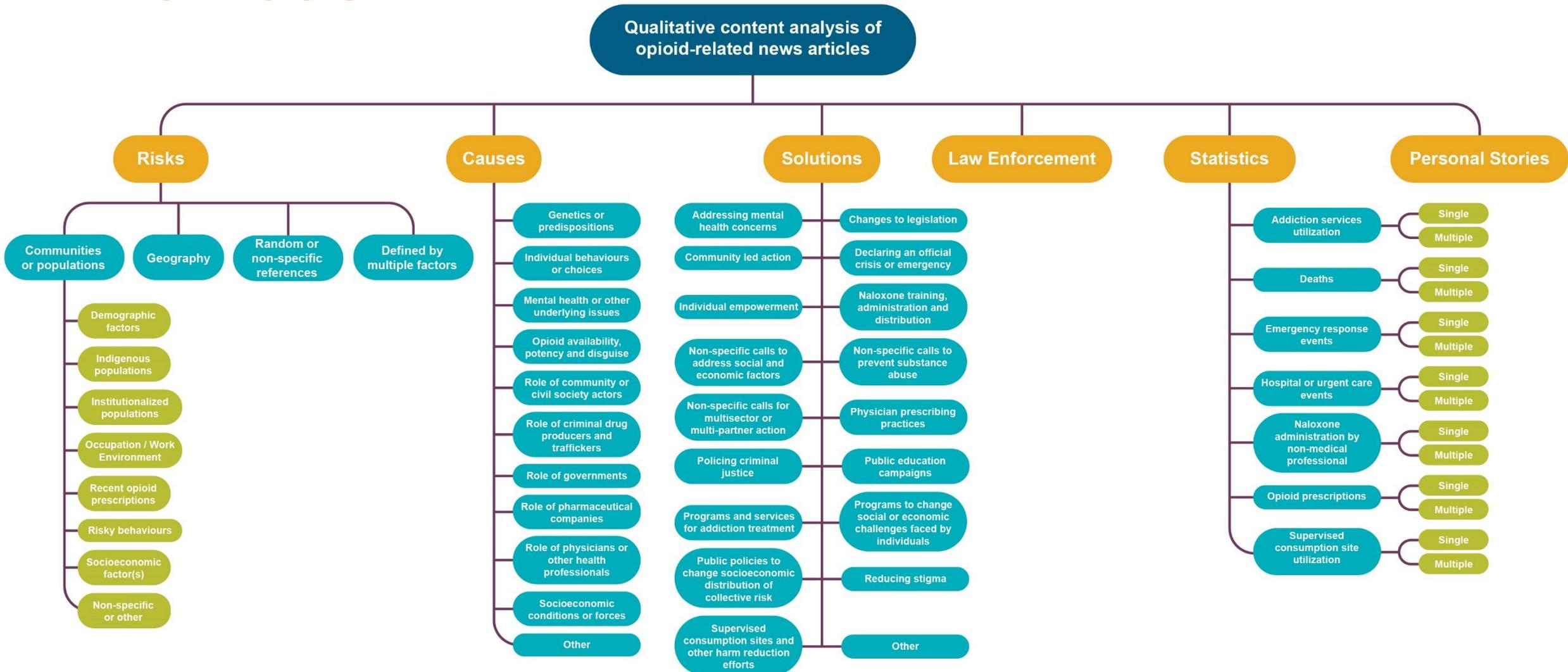
## Solutions

What are the proposed or evolving actions to combat the opioids crisis?

# Methods



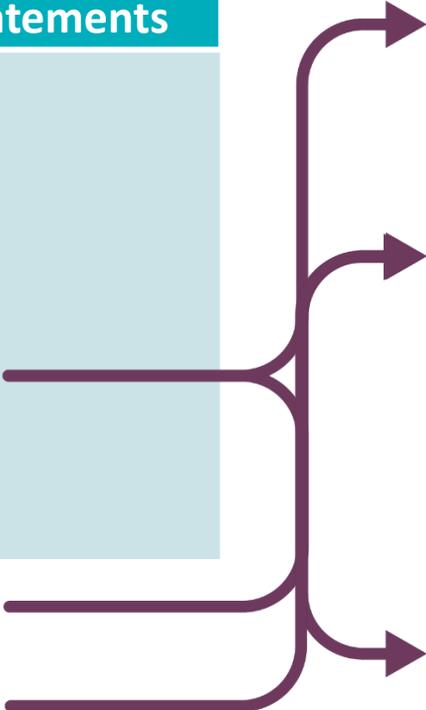
# Methods



# Preliminary findings

# Risk

Risk Quality	% of total risk statements
Communities/populations defined by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demographic factors</li><li>• Risky behaviours</li><li>• Occupation or work environment</li><li>• Indigenous identity</li><li>• <b>Socioeconomic or cultural factors</b></li><li>• Institutionalized populations</li><li>• Recent opioid prescription</li><li>• Other or non-specific</li></ul>	10% 9% 8% 7% <b>6%</b> 3% 2% 3%



# Causes

Cause	% of all references to causes
Opioid availability, potency and disguise	46%
Criminal drug activity	30%
Physician prescribing practices	9%
Role of pharmaceutical companies	4%
Socioeconomic or sociocultural conditions or forces	2%
Individual behaviours/choices	<1%

## Key points

- Top causes were related to features of drug availability and organized crime
- Very few causes acknowledged socioeconomic or sociocultural conditions
- The role of individual choice was almost never mentioned

# Solutions

Solution	% of all references to solutions
Naloxone distribution and administration	23%
Programs for addiction treatment	21%
Public education/awareness	15%
Supervised consumption sites	11%
Policing and criminal justice	10%
Changes to legislation (e.g. decriminalization)	<1%
Programs or services to change social or economic challenges faced by individuals	<1%
Public policies to change socioeconomic distribution of risk	1 reference out of >1000

## Key points

- Top solutions were related to harm reduction efforts
- Policing and criminal justice solutions were relatively uncommon
- Virtually no attention paid to solutions related to social and economic conditions

# Law Enforcement



About one-third of articles entirely or partly characterized by law enforcement theme

# Statistics



About one-third of articles entirely or partly characterized by law enforcement theme



About 60% of articles contain statistics that reflect burden of the crisis (deaths, EMS, hospitalizations)

# Personal Stories



About one-third of articles entirely or partly characterized by law enforcement theme



About 60% of articles contain statistics that reflect burden of the crisis (deaths, EMS, hospitalizations)



About 75 personal stories identified

# Personal Stories

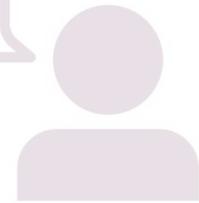


About one-third of articles entirely or partly characterized by law enforcement theme

\_\_\_\_\_ **Calgary Herald** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ February 8, 2017 \_\_\_\_\_

**“...Nathan Huggins-Rosenthal held an MBA and was a stockbroker when he became addicted to the opioid that ultimately killed him.”<sup>8</sup>**

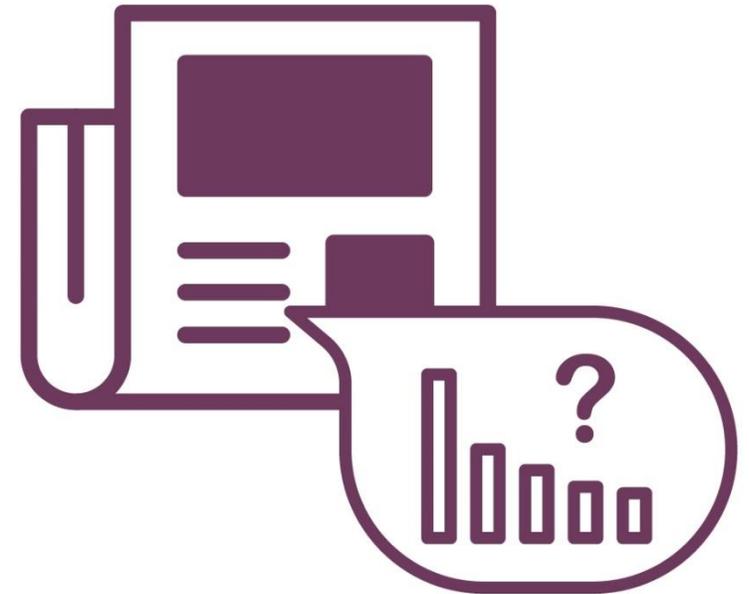
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



5 personal identified

# Preliminary Overarching Conclusions

- Socioeconomic dimensions not apparent
  - Focus on supply side and role of criminals
  - Focus on medicalized/downstream solutions for individuals
  - Risk commonly depicted but rarely accurately depicts social gradient
- Privileged classes legitimize opioid use disorder as a public health crisis
- Conceptualization of causes/risks/solutions unlikely to lead to effective and equitable prevention of future harms



# References

1. Carriere, G., Garner, R., & Sanmartin, C. (2018). Social and economic characteristics of those experiencing hospitalizations due to opioid poisonings. *Health Reports, 29*(10), 23–28.
2. Cairncross, Z. F., Herring, J., van Ingen, T., Smith, B. T., Leece, P., Schwartz, B., & Hohenadel, K. (2018). Relation between opioid-related harms and socioeconomic inequalities in Ontario: A population-based descriptive study. *CMAJ Open, 6*(4), E478.
3. Happer, C., & Philo, G. (2013). The role of the media in the construction of public belief and social change. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 1*(1), 321–336.
4. Bennett, D. (2017, February 7). Alberta reports 343 fentanyl overdose deaths in 2016. *The Star Edmonton*.
5. Logan, S. (2017, February 8). Soaring fentanyl death toll has advocates raising the alarm. *The Calgary Herald*.
6. Ellwand, O. (2016, February 11). Edmonton police warn high school students about deadly dangers of fentanyl. *Edmonton Journal*.
7. Braid, B. (2017, May 31). Alberta takes a big step in fight against opioid deaths, It's about time. *Calgary Herald*.
8. Logan, S. (2017, February 8). Soaring fentanyl death toll has advocates raising the alarm. *The Calgary Herald*.

# Thank you

Amanda Barberio and Brian Ladd

Healthy Public Policy Unit – Alberta Health Services (AHS)

Contact: [Amanda.Barberio@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:Amanda.Barberio@albertahealthservices.ca)

# Newspaper selection

Fort McMurray Today (Daily)

Grand Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune (Daily)

Edmonton Journal (Daily)

Edmonton Sun (Daily)

Star Metro Edmonton (Daily)

St. Albert Gazette (Semiweekly)

Red Deer Advocate (Daily)

Camrose Canadian (Weekly)

Calgary Herald (Daily)

Calgary Sun (Daily)

Star Metro Calgary (Daily)

Airdrie City View (Weekly)

Airdrie Echo (Weekly)

Medicine Hat News (Daily)

Lethbridge Herald (Daily)

Lethbridge Sun Times (Weekly)

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# Limitations

- Newspapers are only one form of media
- Newspaper conglomerates included in the analysis
  - Large urban areas dominated by one media corporation
  - Potential for bias
- Limited geographic scope, thus limited generalizability
- Limited search features for some newspaper databases
- Inter-coder reliability unknown

## Future Directions

- Consider instances of omitted or partial inclusion of information
- Opportunities to examine nodes at smaller scales
  - AHS zone
  - Year of publication
  - Affected by limitations of search strategy
- Opportunities for further exploration and coding within nodes themselves
  - Explore connections with SES
- Compare analysis of news articles with Alberta surveillance data

# Knowledge Translation

## Short Term

Summarize and communicate the findings of this project to AHS Medical Officers of Health and other public health workers involved in efforts to combat the opioids crisis

# Knowledge Translation

## Short Term

Summarize and comm  
project to AHS Medic  
public health workers  
opioids crisis

## Medium Term

Inform advocacy for public policy  
interventions with potential to attenuate  
socioeconomic causes of elevated risk for  
harm or death from opioid misuse

# Knowledge Translation

## Short Term

Summarize and communicate the findings of this project to AHS Medical Officers of Health and other public health workers involved in efforts to combat the opioids crisis

## Medium Term

To inform advocacy for public policy interventions with potential to elevate

## Long Term

Ensure that the opioid crisis in Alberta is addressed more often and widely in public communications as a population health and health equity issue

# Knowledge Translation

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Summarize and communicate the findings of this project to AHS Medical Officers of Health and other public health workers involved in efforts to combat the opioids crisis

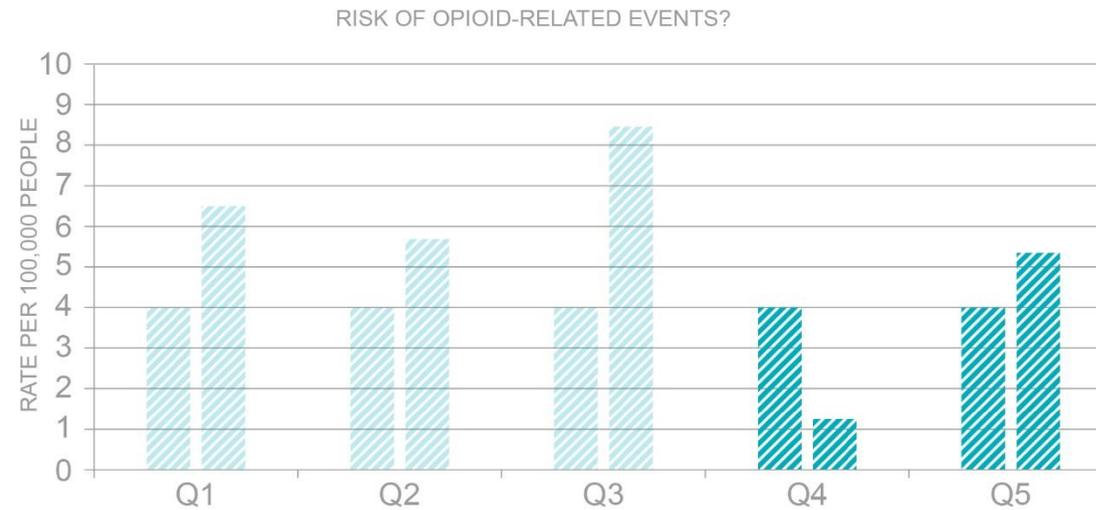
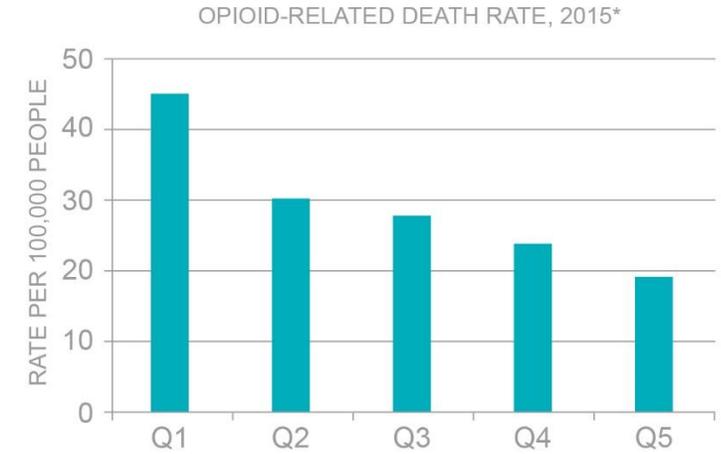
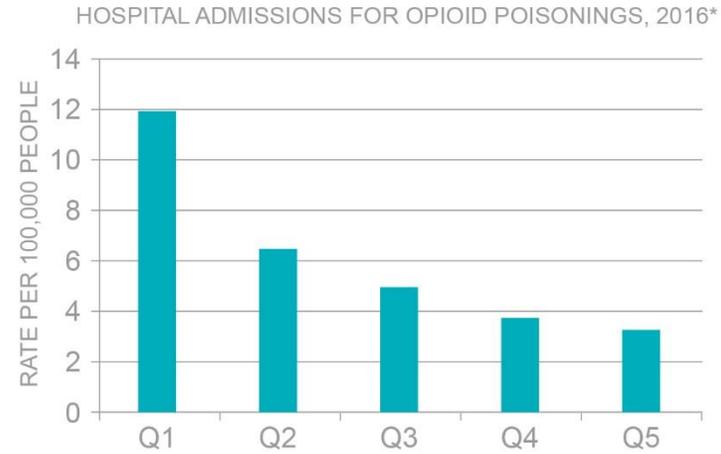
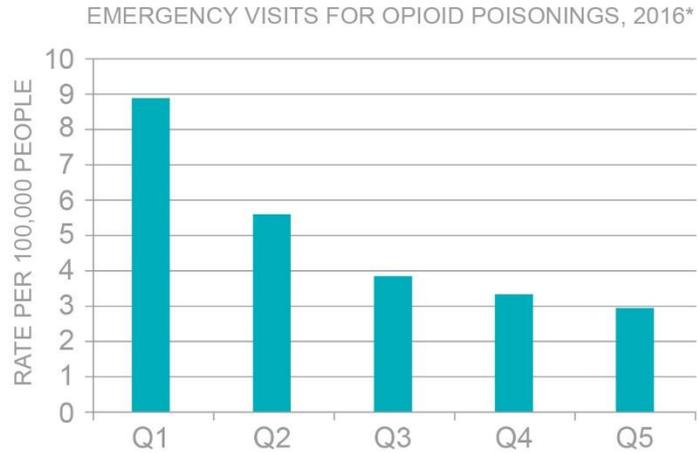
## Medium Term

Inform advocacy for public policy interventions with potential to attenuate socioeconomic causes of elevated risk for harm or death from opioid misuse

## Long Term

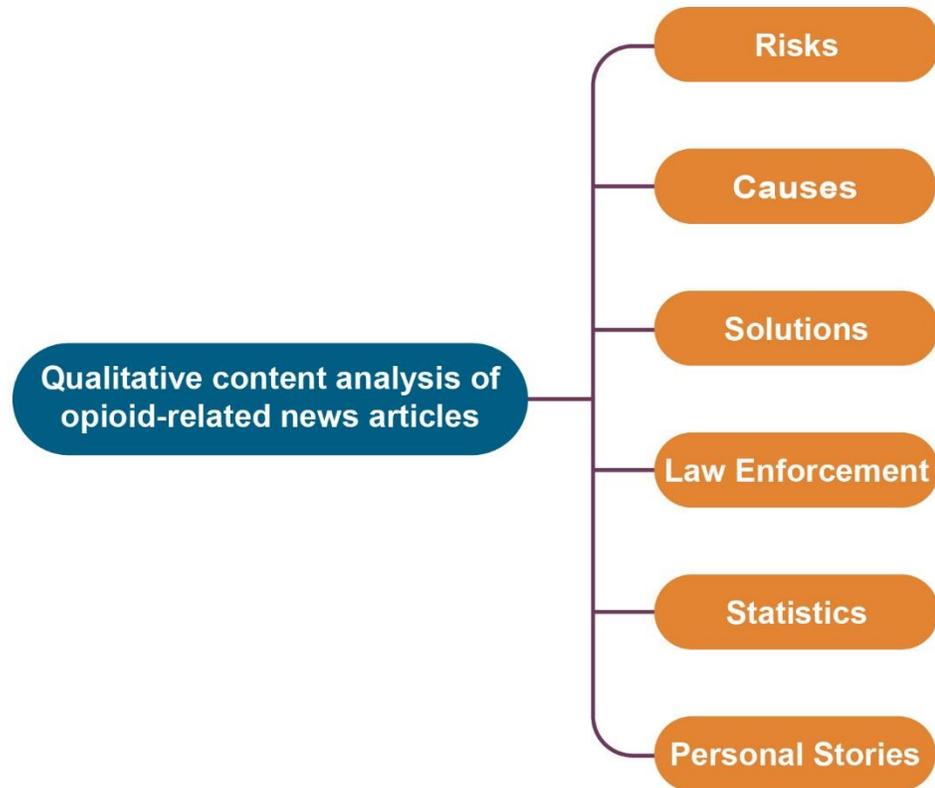
Ensure that the opioid crisis in Alberta is addressed more often and widely in public communications as a population health and health equity issue

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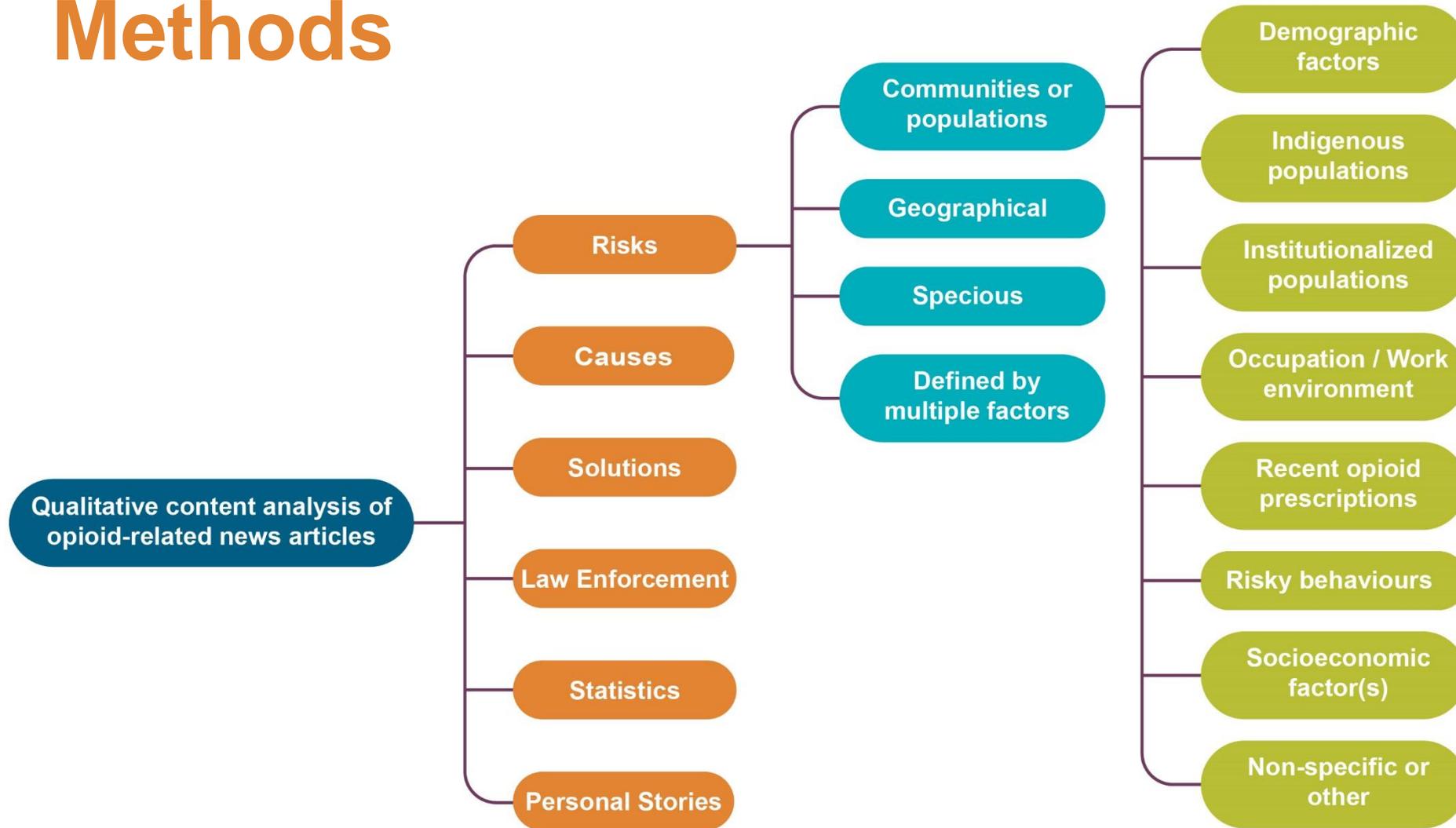


\*adapted from Cairncross et al. (2018)

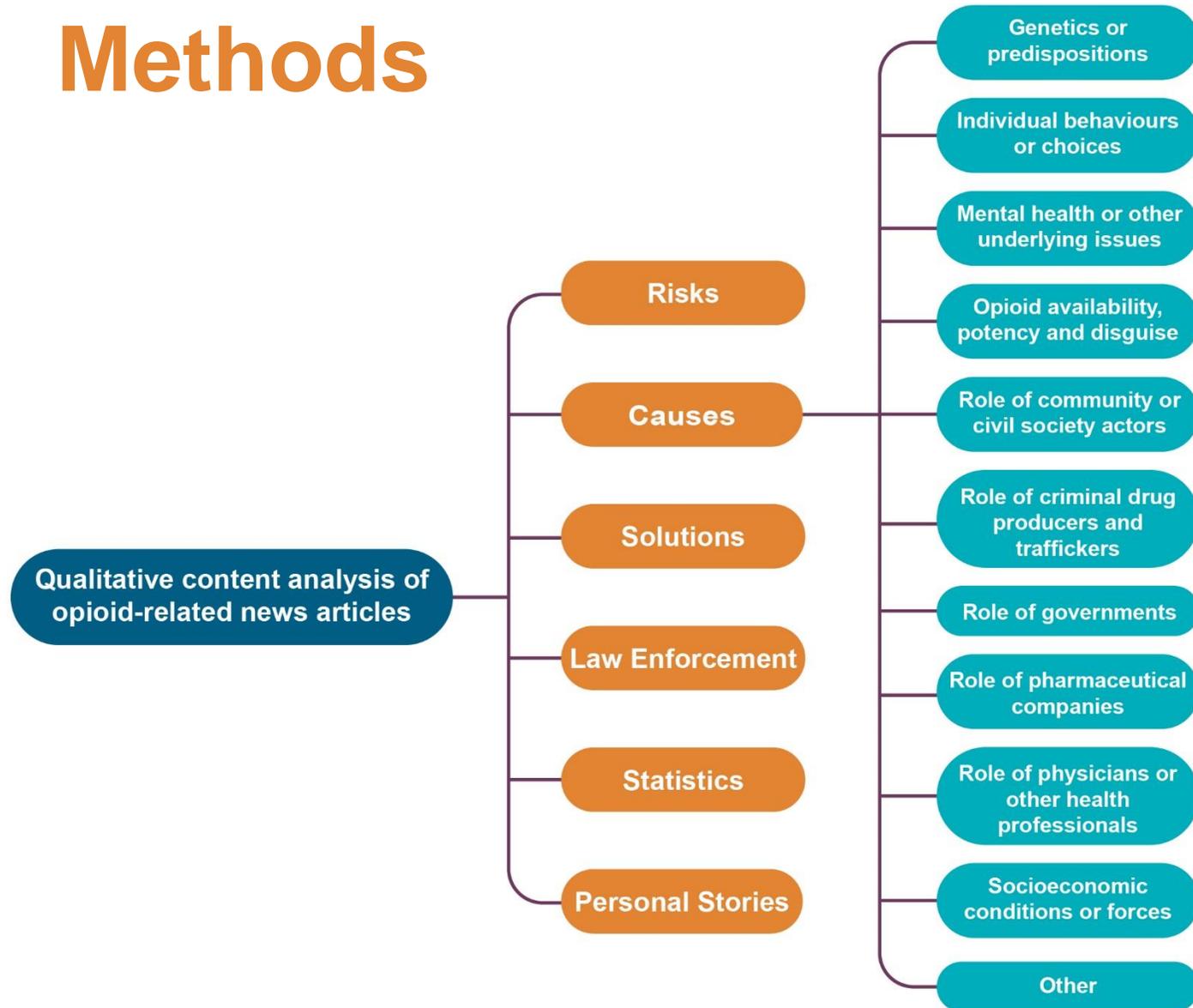
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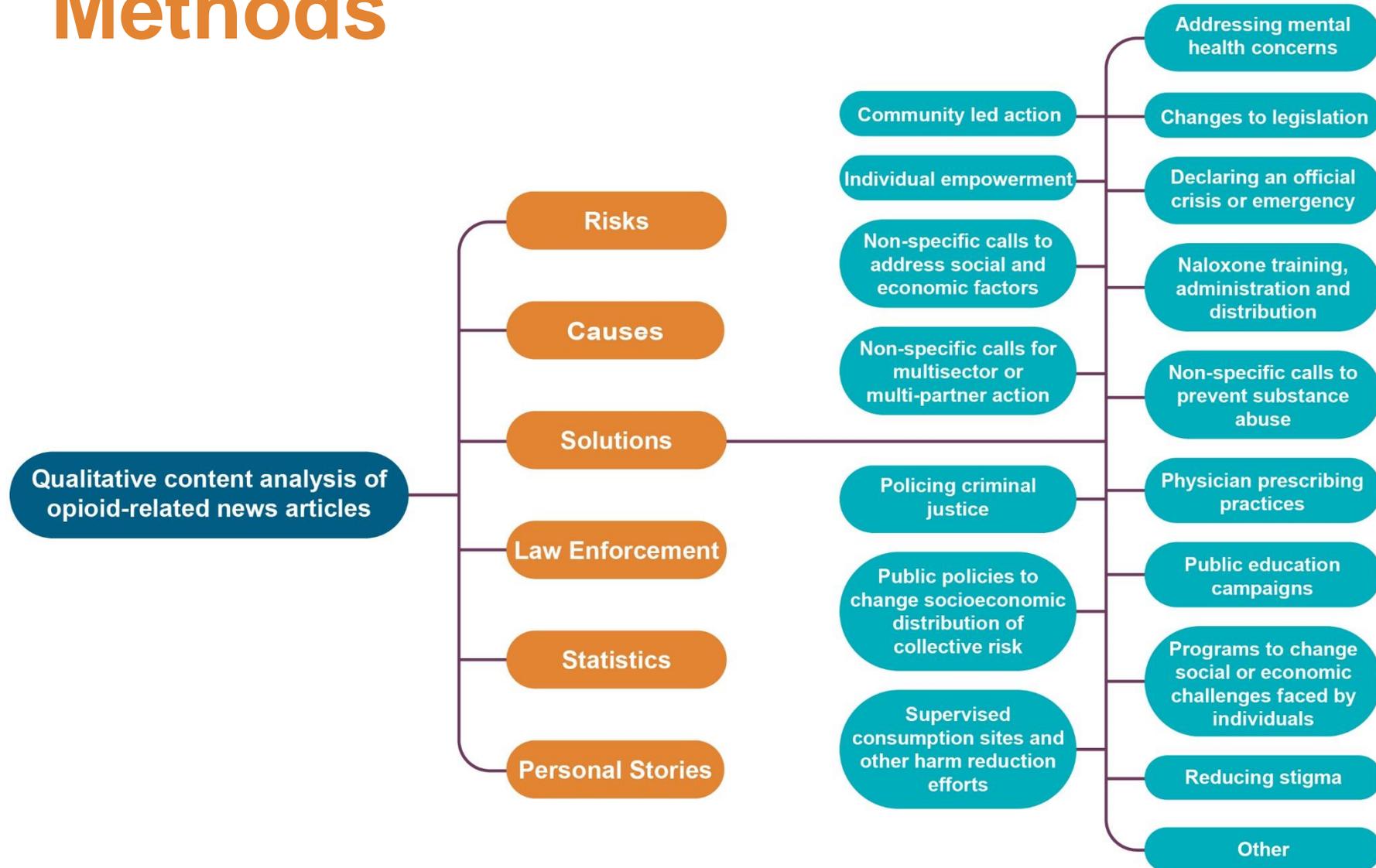
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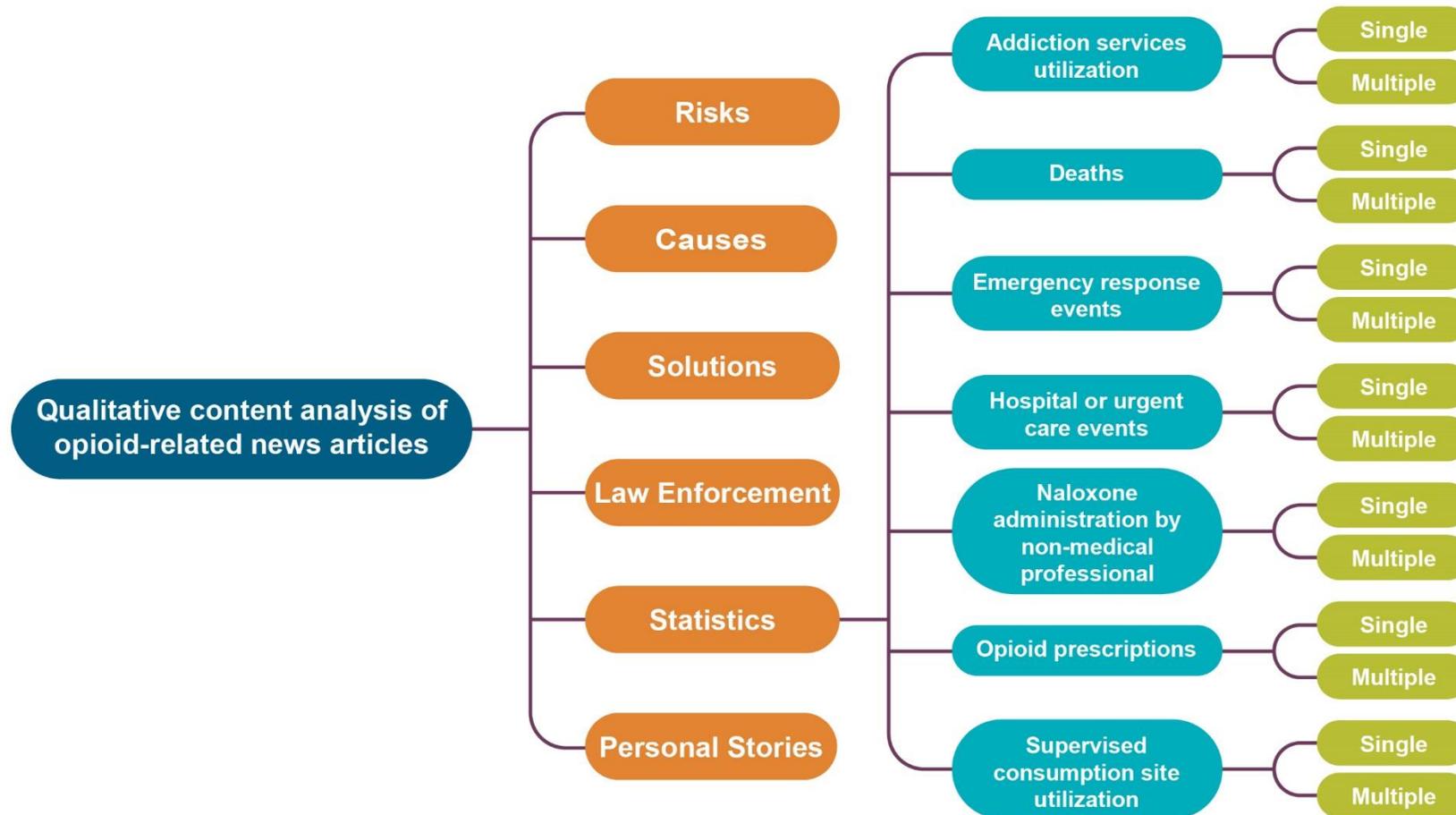
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# Methods



## Media coverage of the opioid crisis

**Describing  
reality?**

**Creating  
reality?**