

OTTAWA'S OVERDOSE RESPONSE STRATEGY

2023 Key Activities

Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force

To learn more about Ottawa's Overdose Response Strategy, visit
[StopOverdoseOttawa.ca](https://www.stopoverdoseottawa.ca).

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Land Acknowledgment



Ottawa Public Health honours the Algonquin Anishinabe people, on whose unceded traditional territory the City of Ottawa is located.

It is a privilege to live and work as a guest within the traditional lands that have been nurtured by the Algonquin Nations for millennia.

We extend this respect to all First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples, their elders, their ancestors and their valuable past and present contributions to this land.

We recognize the impact and legacy of colonization and ongoing systemic racism on the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and are strongly committed to public health actions that promote reconciliation and the health of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and communities. We pledge to continue working to combat stigma and health inequity in our community.

Through discussion and collaboration, Indigenous led organizations have identified the solutions needed for their own communities to combat the overdose crisis. These solutions include an increase of sustainable funding for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Mental Health Teams, Inuit Family Health Teams, and the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition Indigenous Mental Well Being Strategy to enhance mental health and substance use health supports and services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, including the development of new Indigenous Family Healing Lodge(s).

Overdose Crisis Acknowledgment

Ottawa Public Health acknowledges the profound and significant hardships and losses that people continue to experience in the face of the ongoing overdose crisis. The grief, mourning, and distress are felt by many, including families, friends, healthcare, and social service providers, as well as anyone touched by this persistent crisis.

To combat this crisis, it is essential to confront the underlying causes, primarily rooted in discrimination and the insufficient access to essential needs and human rights like proper housing, safety, and support. Individuals using drugs often face stigma and various interconnected forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, and colonialism.

Within this document, we outline key actions being taken to address the crisis, recognizing that there is still much work to be done.



Introduction

A broad multi-faceted response is needed to help address the overdose crises. This is a complex issue compounded by interrelated challenges of childhood experiences, poverty, increased mental health concerns and an increase in the number of residents needing homelessness services in the community, among other drivers.

Overdose”, “toxicity”, and “poisoning” are words that have been used to describe the current crisis in Ontario. Deaths and harms have been linked to multiple substances such as alcohol, opioids, stimulants, and benzodiazepines, regardless of how the drugs were obtained, whether by prescription or other means. Evolving language to reflect the complexity of the situation towards issues experienced by people who use substances may strengthen the understanding and actions required.

The Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force (ODPRTF) and the Ottawa Community Action Plan (O-CAP) have been foundational, and the established activities and plans developed by these two groups will be leveraged in Ottawa’s updated Overdose Response Strategy. The activities and framework of the O-CAP will continue to advance through the collaborative network of partners involved in the Overdose Response Task Force. The tables below highlight key efforts and interventions that are ongoing or in mid-development. It is important to highlight the work in this area to identify what is working and where further gaps and opportunities exist. This table is an evergreen document of key activities that are being taken.



Prevention Across the Lifespan

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Ongoing Interventions		
Advance and promote infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) development.	Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative	The early years are crucial for development. Investments in IECMH to prevent problems occurring later in life from mental health, addictions and substance use health issues.
Provide screening, counselling, referral and early intervention of Perinatal Mood Disorders.	Ottawa Public Health (OPH)	Reduced adverse childhood events (e.g., violence, abuse, neglect). Enhance resiliency.
Provide accessible mental health online modules and education series such as Mind Master's and Healthy Transitions programs for schools and educators.	OPH	Increased positive coping strategies and resiliency among children and youth.
Provide Party Safer training on safer use of many substances, including opioids, how to identify an overdose and access to naloxone kits.	OPH and pharmacy partners	Organizers and volunteers at large events, festivals, secondary and post-secondary institution are better able to prevent & respond to overdoses.
Provide capacity building training for faith leadership and Ottawa's African, Caribbean, Black and racialized communities.	OPH	Increased capacity of Faith Leaders to provide basic mental health, crisis support and suicide prevention to newcomers and racialized communities.
Provide community partners in Neighbourhood Wellness Hubs (NWH) with mental health, addictions, and substance use health (MHAUSH) supports and resources.	OPH	Ensured equitable and safe access to MHASUH information, resources, and services including social services, referrals to partners such as Counselling Connect, AccessMHA, and 1call1click.ca.
Provide mental health focused youth group presentations (English & French) in Ottawa Schools and through the online portal for youth.	Youthnet RéseauAdo (YNRA)	Reduced stigma, increase coping strategies, and encourage youth to reach out for help.

Prevention Across the Lifespan

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Provide mental health, behavioural addictions, and substance use health presentations in Ottawa schools with youth.	Rideauwood (EN), Le Cap (FR)	Increased student access to prevention, education, and treatment to address substance use, behavioral addictions or mental health issues in and out of school.
Support the delivery and funding of Project STEP to address substance use health and technology use in Ottawa schools.	Ottawa Network for Education and OPH	Enhanced the promotion of mental health and substance use health; improve social and physical environments that support health and well-being; and increase prevention across the health system. Increased participation in substance use prevention, education and treatment for young people (12 - 18) to reduce the health and social harms of substance use.
Mid-development Interventions		
Respond to the changing needs of the youth in the community by adapting the Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) peer to peer program based on focus groups with youth from the following equity deserving groups; rural, francophone, African, Caribbean, Black community members and youth from lower socioeconomic status.	OPH	Increased knowledge of positive mental health and substance use health with youth, including positive coping skills and substance refusal skills through peer led initiatives.

Reduce Stigma

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Ongoing Interventions		
Advance collaboration and integration alongside people with lived and living experience through the establishment of an innovative co-location agreement and a joint workplan.	CAPSA and OPH	Improved understanding of substance use health and stigma related harms experienced by people informs service planning and quality improvement. Working alongside people with lived and living experience (PWLLE) ensures that the expertise and knowledge of PWLLE are part of the identified needs and solutions.
Adapt and evolve the spectrum of substance use health knowledge exchange product.	OPH and CAPSA	Advanced understanding of substance use health and further reduce stigma.
Develop “Tips for talking about substance use” resource knowledge exchange product.	Families for Addiction Recovery and OPH	Families and loved ones have safe and more effective conversations about the use of substances.
Develop an e-learning module on Mental Health and Substance Use Health Stigma.	OPH	Expanded reach of training to further reduce stigma.
Expand the Working on Wellness annual event to promote overall wellbeing and the connection between physical health, mental health and substance use health.	CAPSA	Public is more informed about Ottawa’s wellness community services including substance use health, mental health and physical health organizations.
Mid-development Interventions		
Establish a learning opportunity for medical students that focuses on substance use health and stigma.	OPH and CAPSA	Medical students learn about substance use health and the stigma people face. This knowledge helps break down barriers to treatment by addressing and reducing societal stigma.

Harm Reduction

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Ongoing Interventions		
<p>Provide Consumption and Treatment services in collaboration with partners: 3 Consumption and Treatment Services and 1 Supervised Consumption Service (OPH) offering services and referrals to additional health and social services in Ottawa. 1 24-hour access point; partner sites actively working to expand hours of service to meet demand.</p>	<p>Ottawa Inner City Health (OICH), Sandy Hill Community Health Centre (SHCHC), Somerset West (SWCHC), OPH</p>	<p>Reduced deaths by reversing overdoses. Increased # of people connected to additional health and social services through the Supervised Consumption and Treatment Services.</p>
<p>Coordinate and lead the Ontario Naloxone Program (ONP) for the City of Ottawa, which provides take-home naloxone access to eligible organizations and their clients. Expand partnership to include local health and social service agencies, hospital emergency departments, Ottawa Police and Ottawa Paramedic Services.</p>	<p>OPH, 26 community partners including hospitals and first responders</p>	<p>Overdoses from opioids are reversed and deaths are reduced.</p>
<p>Participate in the provincial Ontario Naloxone Pharmacy Program (ONPP), which provides take-home naloxone access to eligible clients.</p>	<p>Pharmacies throughout Ottawa</p>	<p>More individuals are equipped to save lives and reverse fatal overdoses including those at risk, their family, friends, and people who care for others.</p>
<p>Safer Supply Pilot Program: expanded the project to include both a safer opioid and stimulant supply program and additional wrap-around service supports. Sustainability plan building on lessons learned from Substance Use and Addictions Program pilot evaluations.</p>	<p>Safer Supply Ottawa and the University of Ottawa</p>	<p>Decreased reported overdose events; increased engagement in other health care and social services such as housing.</p>

Harm Reduction

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Re-establish and expand drug checking services Aug – Sept 2023.	OICH, SHCHC	Reduced overdoses from the local toxic unregulated supply.
Promote use of the National Overdose Response Service (NORS) and Brave apps for people using alone (peer-based overdose prevention line/app services).	OPH	Reduced overdose deaths for people using alone.
Provide evening outreach to isolated people that use drugs in the Centretown CHC, Carlington CHC, and Somerset West CHC (SWCHC) neighbourhoods. Provide extensive wrap-around support to service users, including access to primary care, mental health, housing, and harm reduction services.	SWCHC DOPE Team (peer support and overdose response)	Timely and effective support to individuals in distress. Reduced calls for service for police and paramedics. Increased safety for both service users and the broader community.
Employ people with lived and living experience of substance use to provide outreach services and improve community connections.	OICH, SHCHC, SWCHC, Drug Users Advocacy League (DUAL)	Increased reach to those segments of the substance using community who are most at risk of overdose and death and who face the most barriers in accessing mainstream health and social service through peer leaders.
Mid-development Interventions		
Explore feasibility to expand services to address overdose by inhalation with partner CTS and clients.	OICH, OPH, SHCHC, SWCHC	Reduced deaths from the inhalation of substances.
Explore feasibility of drug checking services at OPH and Somerset West CHC.	OPH, SWCHC	Reduced overdoses from the local toxic unregulated supply.

Co-ordinated Access to Treatment and Services

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Ongoing Interventions		
Launched the Prompt Care Clinic to provide rapid access to psychiatric consult services for people 18-65.	The Royal Mental Health Centre in collaboration with the Ottawa Hospital	Timely access to specialized psychiatric care for adults ages 18-65 years who are experiencing symptoms of mild to moderate mental illness.
Launched system navigation supports for adults through AccessMHA. People are paired with a mental health and addictions professional.	The Royal, Mental Health and Addictions Partners for Regional Coordinated Access	AccessMHA makes it easier for people 16 and older to find mental health, addictions and/or substance use health support, services, and care through referral and ongoing support. People are paired with a trained mental health and addictions professional to be connected to needed services from a network of partner organizations.
Launched system navigation supports for children, youth and families through 1Call1Click.ca.	Kids Come First Health Team	1call1click.ca matches children, youth (from birth to age 21) and families with mental health, addictions and substance use health care service and assist in making an appointment. Coordinated care for children and youth with complex mental health and addiction needs who require services from numerous providers.
Launched brief intervention counselling online and phone platform, Counselling Connect.	Network of counselling service providers with strategic oversight provided by the Ottawa Health Team.	Faster access to free counselling and support groups for children, youth and adults.
Expanded on the Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) clinic to offer the digital	The Royal Mental Healthcare Centre	Reduced opioid- and alcohol-related emergency department visits, related emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and deaths. Helps to

Co-ordinated Access to Treatment and Services

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
front door to help address the growing need for substance use treatment.		address the growing need for substance use treatment.
Established the Paramedic Mental Wellbeing Response team.	Ottawa Paramedic Services	9-1-1 callers experiencing a mental health issue receive more timely medical assessment, referral, care plan and follow-up.
Advance the City of Ottawa's Community and Social Services Department 10 Year Housing and Homeless Plan 2020-2030.	City of Ottawa	Increased access to supportive housing to minimize harms from substance use in our communities and better support people experiencing challenges from substance use.
Advance strategic action plan that articulates a comprehensive approach to address the immediate, short-term and long-term needs of unsheltered residents. Includes developing accessible & available services to support mental health and substance use health needs in collaboration with partners.	City of Ottawa's Unsheltered Task Force	Decreased individual and societal harmful impacts experienced by people experiencing homelessness and people unstably housed.
Ask Masi: This project, titled "Ask Masi", trains frontline Primary Perinatal Care Providers (PPCP) with existing prescribing authorities how to screen for perinatal mental illnesses and treat low-level anxiety or depression. Provides real-time peer supervision by phone or e-consult to assist PPCPs with practical feedback on more complex cases and community resources. Offers one-time virtual perinatal psychiatry consultation within one week for the most complex cases to assist PPCP with diagnostic clarification.	The Ottawa Hospital (TOH), Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre (OBWC), Champlain Maternal Newborn Regional Program (CMNRP)	Improved access to timely perinatal mental healthcare in the Ottawa region by supporting primary perinatal care providers with prescribing authority such as nurse practitioners, family physicians, and obstetricians to independently care for their patients' mild to moderate perinatal mental illnesses (PMIs) closer to home, in community.

Co-ordinated Access to Treatment and Services

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Established the Archipel Postpartum Wellness clinic.	Archipel Ontario Health Team, the Montfort Hospital, and OPH	Timely postpartum mental health support to birthing individuals without a primary care provider.
Established the Ottawa Mobile Health Unit that provides substance use health and infectious disease services geared to those unstably housed.	Recovery Care, Pathways to Recovery, OICH, OPH	Prevent and treat infectious diseases and substance use disorders.
Established training on co-leading and development with people with lived and living experience (PWLLE) for health care providers including Ontario Health Teams.	CAPSA	Advance efforts to learn from PWLLE as co-leaders, experts and developers in system planning.
Developed knowledge exchange resource of Black MHASUH Service providers in Ottawa.	Somerset West Community Health Centre, OPH	Improve information for people in Ottawa's Black community on where to find culturally appropriate service providers.
Mid-development Interventions		
Proposal completed for the development of a MHASUH Urgent Care centre.	Ottawa West 4 Rivers OHT MHASUH Action Team	Improved access to receiving timely urgent healthcare.
Expansion of the Mental Wellbeing Response team to include access to Rapid Access Addiction Medicine.	Paramedic Services and The Royal	Improved access to low barrier treatment services and Reduced opioid-related emergency department visits, related emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and deaths.

Data and Surveillance

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Ongoing Interventions		
Provide timely surveillance data and early indicators on the overdose crisis on stopoverdoseottawa.ca	OPH	Assess the effectiveness of interventions to prevent and reduce overdoses.
Providing data and evidence that supports actions.	Ottawa Coroner's Office	Safer inhalation services and drug checking services are evidence informed and will lead to reduced deaths.
Implement recommendations from the Mental Health of Ottawa's Black Community Report for mental health supports in Ottawa's Black Community including Establishment of the Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition and targeted interventions with Faith Leaders.	OPH	Address the beliefs, experiences, gaps, and opportunities for mental health supports for people in Ottawa's Black Community.
Conduct Population Health Surveys to assess aspects related to mental health, addictions and substance use health of people in Ottawa.	OPH	Identify local MHASUH needs and issues to inform action.
Analyze and disseminate the Ottawa results of the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health survey.	OPH	Inform service providers about the areas of concern among youth in relation to MHASUH, for system planning and service level interventions.
Launch the Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Community Dashboard which provides a fulsome status of mental health, addictions and substance use health experiences in Ottawa.	OPH, O-CAP steering committee partners, and ODPRTF partners	Inform actions for system and service planning, identify needs and gaps as well as opportunities for research.
Mid-development Interventions		
Conduct follow up survey to understand the stigma that exists by capturing people's perceptions of the others that are experiencing mental health and substance use health concerns.	OPH	Identify beliefs of people in the community as it relates to MHASUH to inform areas of focus when addressing stigma.

Community Safety and Wellbeing

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Ongoing Interventions		
Implementation of the Integrated Community Support Team. A group of organizations with a network of resources to assess needs and deliver a wide array of services from legal support, street outreach, housing, medical treatment, substance use treatment, emergency shelters, safer supply and targeted engagement and diversion.	Ottawa Police Services (OPS)	People identified as chronic re-offenders are assessed and connected to needed supports. Community needs are assessed with partner agencies.
Provide residents and business with support and information.	City of Ottawa's Community Engagement Team	Better understanding of concerns and assist with coordination of services.
Enhance the Community Needle Retrieval Programming in areas of identified need identified by community partners, local businesses, community members and health and social services partners. Launch an enhanced community needle reporting process.	OPH	Increased needle drop box locations and needle hunter routes. Increased coordination and enhancement of city and community partner discarded needle retrieval services.
Conduct routine inspections, complaint-based investigations, enforcement and public reporting for Ontario Ministry of Health funded Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) operating within the City of Ottawa.	OPH	Results of the routine inspection are found at ottawapublichealth.ca

Community Safety and Wellbeing

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Mid-development Interventions		
Launch the Safer Alternatives for Mental Health and Substance Use Crises Response pilot (in Centretown, starting in 2024)	Guiding Council and the Community Safety and Well-being Plan,	Provide community members with a community-based, civilian-led, multi-disciplinary and mobile crisis response teams that offer 24 hours a day, seven days a week, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate crisis response with linkages to wrap around services.
Implement the new 'Block Leaders' program pilot.	OICH and the ByWard Market Balanced Task Force	Restore positive aspects of street culture with a priority on improving behavioral norms with people experiencing homelessness and those who use substances.
Advocating for improved community connections and cohesiveness for people experiencing homelessness and all people that work, live and visit the ByWard Market. All people in the ByWard Market have an urgent need for community spaces where people can meet, congregate and connect.	ByWard Market Balanced Task Force	Restore safe spaces where people can build community with an increased focus on animation, beautification and better lighting, and increased access to resources that meet basic needs.
Establishment of the Sandy Hill Community Liaison Committee (SHCLC) in September 2023, which includes a broad and inclusive representation of business owners, direct and indirect service providers, housed residents and persons with lived/living experience with homelessness and/or addictions.	Action Sandy Hill, SHCHC, City of Ottawa Community Engagement Team	This committee endeavors to work together to have unique perspectives heard as it relates to the localized impacts of rising unmet housing, social and healthcare needs and the toxic drug supply in the area and strives to work on short and long term localized solutions for a safe and thriving community for all. As activities start to take shape, regular briefings will be produced from this group and shared with federal, provincial, municipal and other stakeholders.
Development of a Community Hub in the ByWard Market.	OPS	A public-facing storefront that is easily accessible to residents and those in need to connect them with either police or social services. The hub would house all City

Community Safety and Wellbeing

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
		partners and provide a one-stop shop for those seeking help, particularly those at high risk.

Cluster Response and Alert Systems

Interventions	Lead Agencies	Outcomes and Impacts
Ongoing Interventions		
Developed and continue to maintain an early warning and enhanced local surveillance system, which includes real-time qualitative and quantitative indicators and complementary information on local overdose risk (stopoverdoseottawa.ca)	ODPRTF and OPH	Communicate public messages to provide timely and lifesaving information on the toxic drug supply, knowing the signs of an overdose, carrying naloxone, and calling 9-1-1.
Issue timely drug warnings and share information on local trends that impact health and wellbeing (i.e., new substances in the toxic drug supply such as xylazine and benzodiazepines).	ODPRTF, the Office of the Chief Coroner	Provide timely warnings of local trends and toxic substances in the drug supply allows for earlier action to prevent further harms and deaths.
Maintain the “Ottawa Inter-agency Opioid Overdose Cluster Response Plan”	ODPRTF	Outlines the operational responses of all partner organizations to a cluster of opioid overdoses in the City.

Partners Involved in the Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force

