



WECOSS Project Proposal – Harm Reduction

Project Name: Building Community for Harm Reduction

Background & Purpose

Provide context for what conditions exist that have created the need for this project. Why is the project being undertaken? Describe an opportunity or problem that the project will address.

Over the last decade, there has been a drastic increase in the number of opioid toxicity events reported across the province of Ontario (Public Health Ontario, 2024). The Windsor-Essex County area has been disproportionately affected by these alarming trends, surpassing provincial mortality rates for six consecutive years from 2018-2023 (WECHU, 2024).

In 2023, the highest annual number of opioid-related deaths to ever be recorded in the Windsor-Essex County area was also observed at 127 deaths (WECHU, 2024). This translated to a local mortality rate of 28.9 per 100,000 population, which was significantly higher than the 2023 provincial rate of 16.8. The toxicity of the local drug supply is substantiated by the nature of the deaths reported, with the majority of deaths being accidental (N=110 deaths) and fentanyl being the most prevalent opioid present at death (86.4% of deaths).

In light of this data, the growing need for harm reduction services is more evident now than ever before. Local action is needed to continue to educate the community on the importance of harm reduction practices, dispel harmful ideologies surrounding harm reduction, and advocate for use of harm reduction models within applicable community settings. The WECOSS Harm Reduction Working Group will support this work in 2025 through the implementation of a comprehensive community education/anti-stigma campaign on harm reduction as a valued and evidence-based practice to support people who use drugs and the community. Various tactics will be explored to engage a variety of stakeholders around the concept of harm reduction, such as media marketing, community service workshops, peer engagement, policy/position statements, and other strategies.

To bring related education/supplies to those in need or in a position to support, the Harm Reduction Working Group will also continue to deliver overdose prevention/response and safer consumption training events in 2025. These events will also serve as a platform to engage key stakeholders in the 2025 education campaign.

Goals & Objectives

What goal(s) does the project aim to accomplish? List the achievements/objectives that can be attained/met along the way to your goal.

- Improve community knowledge and awareness about harm reduction, lower-risk use methods, and overdose response/prevention practices.
- Dispel harmful ideologies and reduce stigma towards harm reduction practices.
- Increase use of harm reduction models within community service settings.

Strategic Alignment
<p><i>Which Modernization Recommendation(s) does this work support?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority #4: Augment harm reduction services and supplies through coordinated agency involvement and policy supports.
Target Audience
<p><i>Who will realize the benefits of the project (e.g., people who use drugs, service providers, etc.)? In other words, whose needs will be met from the project meeting its pre-defined goal(s)?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents of Windsor-Essex County • People who use drugs and their loved ones • Community service organizations • Policy makers and key decision-makers
Project Activities
<p><i>What activities or deliverables are within scope for this project?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an education campaign plan outlining key activities and methods for engaging target groups around harm reduction. • Develop, promote, and distribute campaign content and materials. • Collaborate with community partners to plan, promote, coordinate, and deliver community training events on overdose response/prevention and safer consumption. • Evaluate efficacy of campaign and training activities in achieving project goals.

References:

Public Health Ontario. (2024). Opioids and Opioid Mortality. Retrieved from <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Substance-Use/Opioid-Mortality>.

Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU). (2024). Opioid Surveillance Dashboard for Windsor and Essex County. Accessed on 12-04-2024. Retrieved from <https://www.wechu.org/reports/opioids>.