



WINDSOR-ESSEX
COMMUNITY
**OPIOID &
SUBSTANCE**
STRATEGY

WECOSS Leadership Committee Meeting

**Monday, June 23rd from
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

Opioids and Substances Data Review

Background

- ❖ Every month, the Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) for Ontario develops a report that provides an early signal of trends in suspect drug-related deaths and preliminary data on opioid, stimulant, and other drug toxicity deaths in Ontario.
- ❖ Monthly reports are available on the PHO website at the provincial and public health unit levels and can be used to develop recommendations to help improve public safety and prevent deaths in similar circumstances.

Overview

Windsor-Essex County Trends in Context

- WEC among highest in opioid-related harms since 2019
- This summary compares WEC to Ontario in:
 - Opioid-related Emergency Department (ED) visits
 - Opioid-related deaths
 - Suspected drug-related deaths (opioids + other substances)

Opioid-Related ED Visits

Key Findings – 2024

- **519 ED visits** for opioid overdose in WEC – highest on record
 - **WEC rate:** 11.09 per 10,000
 - **Ontario rate:** 7.76 per 10,000
- More than **double** 2019 count (258)
- Indicates escalating burden on local health systems

Opioid-Related Deaths

Key Findings – 2023–2024

- **127 opioid-related deaths** in WEC in 2023
 - **WEC rate:** 28.9 per 100,000
 - **Ontario rate:** 16.8 per 100,000
- WEC rate has increased every year from 2019-2023
- In Q2 2024
 - **WEC rate:** 24.7 per 100,000
 - **Ontario rate:** 15.1 per 100,000

Suspected Drug-Related Deaths

2023-2024 Data (Opioids + Other Substances)

- **175 suspected drug-related deaths** in WEC in 2023
 - **WEC Rate:** 3.74 per 10,000
 - **Ontario Rate:** 2.48 per 10,000
- Higher than Ottawa (2.68) and London-Middlesex (2.52)
- 134 deaths recorded in 2024 (to date)
 - Expected to increase 10-20% as pending cases are confirmed by the Chief Coroner

WECOSS Working Group Project Updates

Harm Reduction (A. Adams)

Building Community for Harm Reduction: Anti-Stigma Programming

Project Purpose:

Implement policy solutions and community education interventions to dispel harmful ideologies, improve knowledge/attitudes, and reduce stigma towards harm reduction.

Key Activities and Outputs:



Development of an anti-stigma policy template for organizations.



Anti-stigma workshops for organizations to support integration of the policy into practice.



Anti-stigma social media campaign to promote understanding of harm reduction.



Harm Reduction (A. Adams)

Building Community for Harm Reduction: Anti-Stigma Programming

Achievements to Date:

- ❖ Issued an **assessment survey** to community partners to understand policy and practice needs as it relates to harm reduction anti-stigma (**31 participants**).
- ❖ **Key policy and practice issues** contributing to the stigmatization of people who use substances within service settings included:
 - ❖ Implicit bias amongst staff and negative treatment of clients who use substances
 - ❖ Insufficient lived experience representation across organizations
 - ❖ Stigmatizing language within service delivery and documentation procedures
 - ❖ Abstinence-only expectations
 - ❖ Inadequate formal policies on stigma reduction
 - ❖ Limited collaboration with harm reduction agencies
- ❖ Drafted an **anti-stigma policy template and workshop content** based on the results.
- ❖ Material is **universal** and can be applied and/or adapted to various service settings.

Harm Reduction (A. Adams)

Building Community for Harm Reduction: Anti-Stigma Programming

Next Steps:

- Review and finalize policy template and workshop content with the HRWG **(Summer 2025)**.
- Schedule and deliver workshops and policy template to community organizations **(Fall 2025)**.
- Develop and implement anti-stigma social media campaign **(Fall 2025)**.

Calls to Action for the Leadership Committee:

- Continue to reach out to Anastasia if your agency is interested in receiving support with anti-stigma policy development.
- Amplify anti-stigma campaign messaging on your channels (campaign calendar will be shared in the Summer).

Prevention and Education (K. Willis/J. Bradt)

Youth and Family Engagement and Outreach for Substance Use Prevention

Project Purpose:

To educate and build community capacity for substance use prevention among youth and families.

Key Activities and Outputs:



Partner with CMHA-WECB to implement the Icelandic Prevention Model (*Planet Youth*) locally.



Host in-person and virtual education sessions on substance use prevention for parents, caregivers, and families.



Collaborate with school boards to provide resources and lesson plans to support schools.



Launch a mass communication campaign on supporting the family environment for youth substance use prevention.



Participate as guest speakers at community events.



Prevention and Education (K. Willis/J. Bradt)

Youth and Family Engagement and Outreach for Substance Use Prevention

Achievements to Date:

- ❖ **Six** community events attended from **February 23rd to May 21st** to share information with parents/caregivers, teachers, and youth about substance use prevention.
 - ❖ **90%** of engaged participants (**63/70**) reported improved awareness of substance use prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services.
- ❖ **5-minute workshop presentation** for parents/caregivers on “*Navigating Youth Substance Use*” developed for delivery at future community events.
- ❖ **Newsletter** issued to local schools with information about a **five-part** webinar series offered through School Mental Health Ontario. Series was targeted to parents/caregivers and focused on supporting child well-being as it relates to substance use.
- ❖ **Six** campaign messages issued on social media to date. First **three** messages had a cumulative reach of **39,881** on Facebook. Remaining metrics are forthcoming.
- ❖ **Youth Mental Health grant application** for local implementation of *Planet Youth* awaits approval.

Prevention and Education (K. Willis/J. Bradt)

Youth and Family Engagement and Outreach for Substance Use Prevention

Next Steps:

- Deliver extended in-person workshops on “*Navigating Youth Substance Use*” at community organizations who serve parents/caregivers of youth.
- Support policy development at local schools around addressing tobacco, vaping, and nicotine use at school.
- Continuously update the WECHU’s School Health web page with relevant information on substance use prevention:
<https://www.wechu.org/school-health>.
- Continue with social media campaign and attendance at community events to distribute prevention information.

Calls to Action for the Leadership Committee:

- Contact Jenny and Kim if your agency serves parents/caregivers of youth and is interested in coordinating a workshop for your clients on “*Navigating Youth Substance Use*”.
- Advise of any upcoming community events that the PEWG can support to reach parents/caregivers of youth with substance use prevention information.

Treatment and Recovery (J. Lear-Zylstra/K. Leckonby)

Expanding Access to Opioid Agonist Therapy

Project Purpose:

Support improved access to opioid agonist therapy (OAT) for individuals living with opioid use disorder in the community.

Key Activities and Outputs:



Deliver in-person and virtual training sessions for health and social service providers on OAT.



Improve navigability of OAT on WEC Connect.



Develop provider and client referral resources to support appropriate connections to OAT.



Treatment and Recovery (J. Lear-Zylstra/K. Leckonby)

Expanding Access of Opioid Agonist Therapy

Achievements to Date:

- ❖ Defined the **overarching delivery model** for future OAT trainings:
 - ❖ **Universal training** for those working in various settings (e.g., community health, substance use/mental health agencies, social services, emergency settings, primary care, etc.).
 - ❖ Targeted to **frontline service providers** who support or work directly with people who use opioids.
 - ❖ Training will provide **baseline information about OAT** to support provider-to-client conversations and appropriate connections to this service.
 - ❖ In-person and virtual training options will be offered.
- ❖ Confirming list of TRWG members who will help to facilitate future OAT training sessions.
- ❖ Developed a needs assessment survey to understand knowledge gaps and learning needs of frontline service providers as it relates to OAT.

Treatment and Recovery (J. Lear-Zylstra/K. Leckonby)

Expanding Access of Opioid Agonist Therapy

Next Steps:

- Issue the OAT Training Needs Assessment Survey to community partners ***(June 2025)***.
- Use results to develop training content/resources and identify specific settings for engagement ***(July – August 2025)***.
- Improve availability of information and search filters for OAT on WEC Connect ***(July – August 2025)***.
- Confirm speakers/facilitators and schedule/deliver OAT trainings ***(Fall 2025)***.

Calls to Action for the Leadership Committee:

- ❖ Encourage frontline providers at your organization and within your network to complete the needs assessment survey.
- ❖ Contact Judy and Kayla if you or anyone in your network specializes in the delivery of OAT and would be willing to help facilitate future trainings.

Enforcement and Justice (J. Rafuse/D. Connor)

Strengthening Community Safety and Well-Being

Project Purpose:

Sustain and expand the neighbourhood safety planning project initiated by the Substance Supports in Neighbourhoods Accessed through Police Partnerships (SSNAPP) team.

Key Activities and Outputs:



Attend community housing events to educate residents about the existing neighbourhood safety plans developed for the City of Windsor.



Conduct a community consultation to examine neighbourhood safety issues/needs in the Municipality of Leamington.



Create a neighbourhood safety plan for the Municipality of Leamington.



Enforcement and Justice (J. Rafuse/D. Connor)

Strengthening Community Safety and Well-Being

Achievements to Date:

- ❖ Attended **six** community housing events from **January 30th to May 29th** to educate residents about the existing neighbourhood safety plans:
 - ❖ **196** residents engaged and shown how to use the plans.
 - ❖ **92%** indicated they felt more confident in supporting community safety related to substance use after receiving a review of the plans.
 - ❖ **1,420** plans distributed as of June 9th, 2025.
- ❖ Collaborated with the OPP and the City of Windsor to apply for a second **Community Safety and Policing Grant** (first grant funded SSNAPP) to support the development and implementation of neighbourhood safety plans for Essex-County, starting with the **Leamington** area.
- ❖ Finalized **consultation materials** for the Leamington safety plan, including a survey and focus group guide targeted to those who live/work within or frequent the Leamington area.
- ❖ Compiled a list of **key stakeholders** to engage in the Leamington safety plan consultation.

Enforcement and Justice (J. Rafuse/D. Connor)

Strengthening Community Safety and Well-Being

Next Steps:

- Launch the community consultation for the Leamington safety plan (**Summer 2025**).
- Use consultation findings to develop and distribute the Leamington safety plan (**Fall 2025**).
- Continue to attend community housing events to educate residents about the existing plans (**Ongoing**).

Calls to Action for the Leadership Committee:

- ❖ Encourage your staff who work in Leamington to participate in the safety plan consultation.
- ❖ Continue to encourage use and distribution of the existing safety plans amongst your staff, clients, and networks. The existing plans are available on WECOSS.ca.

WECOSS Annual Report 2024

2024 WECOSS Annual Report Highlights

Opioid Substance Use Notification System (OSUNS)

- 8 alerts issued (February – July 2024)
- Over the months of June and July, alert criteria was met in five of six weeks
- In response, the WECOSS Leadership Committee identified and implemented urgent strategies to mitigate the rise in overdose numbers, including:
 - Launching a community drug reporting form
 - Modifying alerts (e.g. adding messaging about NORS to alerts)
 - Developing partnerships with shelters and outreach teams
 - Hosting a naloxone training event
 - Promoting existing care pathways
- Since these strategies were implemented, the number and rate of local opioid overdose ED cases has reduced significantly
- No other alerts have been issued by the OSUNS following the last alert in July 2024

2024 WECOSS Annual Report Highlights

Prevention and Education

- **WECOSS Alerts Promotion:** 10 transit ads, Google Display Ads (429,765 impressions), and social media messages that reached 36,933 users
- **Break the Vape:** School vaping cessation contest. 98 submissions, 3,600 votes
- **Medicine Cabinet Clean-Out events:** Hosted to collect unused/expired medication for proper disposal at the pharmacy

Harm Reduction

- **Community Overdose Prevention Trainings:** 10 events hosted, 138 naloxone kits, 595 drug test strips distributed
- **Needle Syringe Program:** 582,501 needles distributed, 57 referrals made to other services
- **Ontario Naloxone Program:** 30 active members, 4 new members onboarded, 1,838 naloxone kits and single spray doses distributed , 1,251 individuals trained in naloxone administration
- **Drug Test Distribution Program:** Onboarded 8 community partners who distributed 691 drug test strips (complete data from Q1-Q4)

2024 WECOSS Annual Report Highlights

Treatment and Recovery

- **WEC Connect** searchable inventory launched October 23rd with 120+ programs aimed at supporting individuals impacted by substance use and mental health problems.
- Between launch date and January 17th of 2025, the platform received 4,579 visits.
- The social media launch reached over 22K users, with more than 3.1K engagements.

Enforcement and Justice

- **4 workshops on substance use in corrections**
- 197 participants, including current and prospective justice involved workers
- 82.6% improved confidence for supporting justice-involved clients

WECOSS Strategic Planning Consultation

Background

- ❖ Over the last four years, the Windsor-Essex Community Opioid and Substance Strategy (WECOSS) has been guided by the **2021 Modernization Plan**.
- ❖ As of 2025, the WECOSS has implemented numerous strategies to address each of the 2021 Modernization recommendations and is prepared to **reposition itself** to identify **new priorities** and **areas of focus** for the years ahead.
- ❖ The **local landscape** surrounding substance use has **changed vastly** since 2021 and therefore, the WECOSS recognizes the **need to revitalize** to remain timely and reflective of current community needs and capacities.

WECOSS Strategic Planning Consultation

Purpose:

Gather input from the community that will inform the development of a renewed, community-informed action plan for the WECOSS.

Goals:

Identify the most pressing issues and concerns impacting the WEC community as it relates to various forms of substance use.

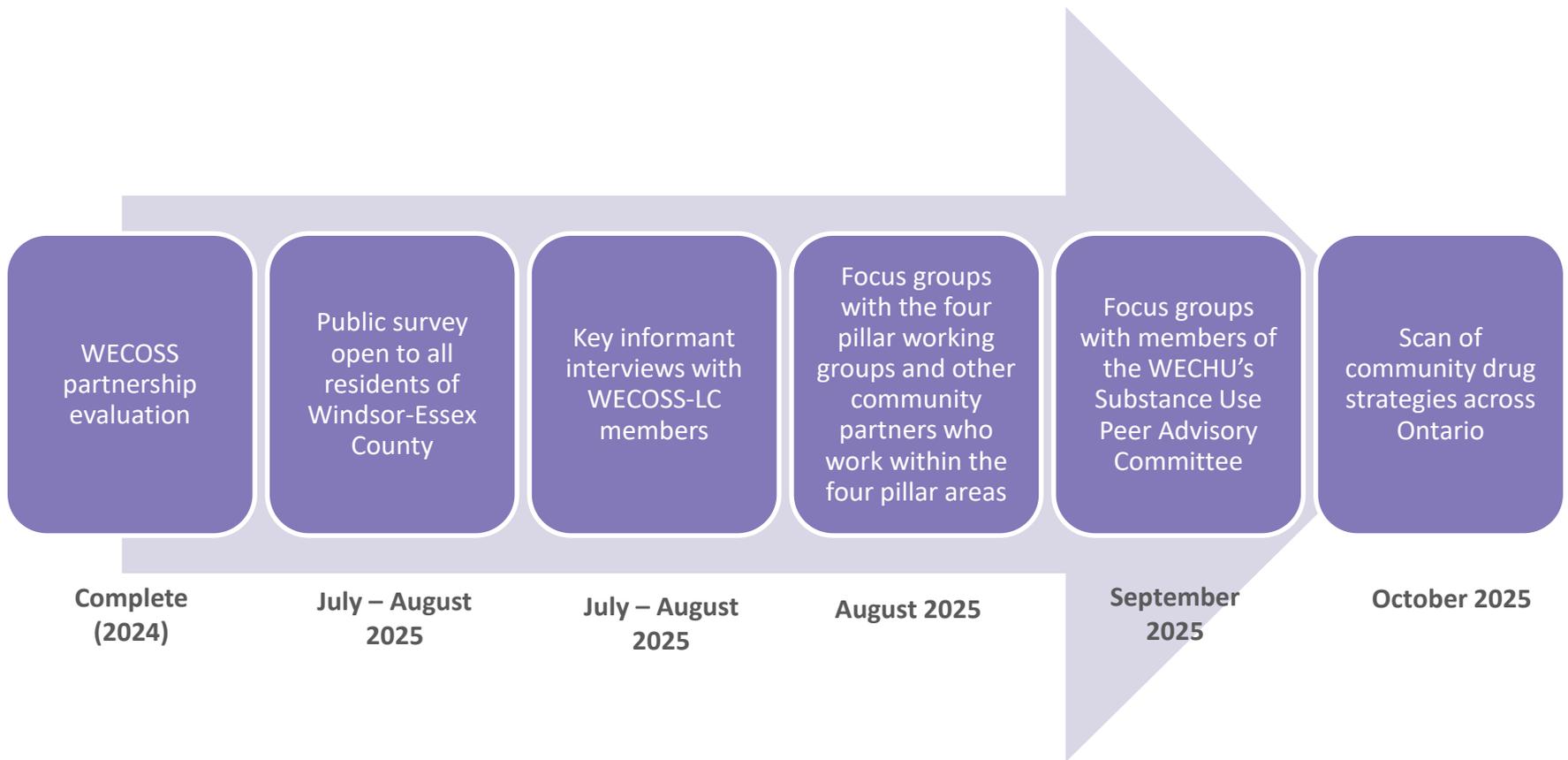
Confirm existing strengths, capacities, and resources currently available to address these concerns at the community level.

Solidify community needs, gaps, and priorities for the WECOSS to address in its future work with community partners.

Define the WECOSS' role in the community by identifying strategies to improve coordination and reduce duplication between the WECOSS and other emerging community initiatives.

Use results from the consultation to generate recommendations guiding the strategic direction for the WECOSS in 2026 and beyond.

Methods & Timelines



Upcoming WECOSS-LC Meetings

Strategic Planning

Q3
(October
2025)

- Review results from community consultation
- Review draft recommendations for action plan and vote on key decision-making items

Q4
(December
2025)

- Review draft action plan
- Determine implementation plan starting in 2026