



## WECOSS Project Proposal – Prevention and Education

**Project Name:**

*Community Engagement for Substance Use Prevention and Health Promotion*

**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.*

Local data available to date demonstrates that the Windsor-Essex County (WEC) area continues to be heavily impacted by substance use-related harms, ranging from opioid, other drug, alcohol, and vaping use (WECHU, 2024; CIHR, UOW, & Brock University, 2023-2024). The Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy (CDSS, 2024) identifies substance use prevention as key to reversing the current trends of substance-use related harms reported across the nation.

Substance use prevention involves the use of strategies that aim to prevent or delay the onset of substance use by addressing related risk factors and increasing known protective factors (CDSS, 2024; CCSA, 2013). Risk factors across the life span that can increase the likelihood of experiencing substance use-related harms include, but are not limited to, poverty, drug availability, trauma and childhood adversity, negative school environments, exposure to peer substance use, unmanaged chronic pain, and other factors (CDSS, 2024). Protective factors that help reduce these risks include, but are not limited to, physical safety, social inclusion, safe neighbourhoods, positive school and family environments, caregiver involvement and monitoring, stable housing, and healthy behavioural development (e.g., coping skills) (CDSS, 2024).

Health promotion complements this work by aiming to strengthen the health and well-being of communities, addressing the root causes of substance use across the life span, and reducing socio-economic inequities impacting substance use (CCSA, 2013). When combined, strategies using both prevention and health promotion approaches have emerged as a promising practice to prevent and reduce substance use-related harms (CCSA, 2013). Comprehensive evidence-based prevention/health promotion approaches with demonstrated success in achieving these goals include building healthy public policy, creating supportive environments for health, strengthening community action for health, developing personal skills, and reorienting health services (CCSA, 2013).

Given the multi-layered nature of substance use prevention/health promotion (SUPHP) work and the various areas in which this work can intersect with the activities of other sectors (e.g., housing, education, mental health, family health), WECOSS partners have voiced a lack of common understanding of the community's strengths and needs when it comes to SUPHP. Changes in local services and shifts in resources during and following the pandemic have also led to a lack of clarity on which agencies/stakeholders are involved in this work and in what capacities and where additional investments may be needed to address local gaps. Local priorities are also unclear, given the many forms of substance use impacting the area, the various risk and protective factors to be addressed, and the uncertainties around local resource allocation.

To avoid duplication and increase meaningful coordination across sectors, an assessment of the current landscape relative to evidence-based practices is needed to develop a comprehensive and community-informed SUPHP strategy for WEC. According to the CCSA (2013), assessing community strengths and needs is the first step to planning effective SUPHP interventions. This also allows for an inter-disciplinary planning approach that recognizes the multi-faceted nature of substance use as a complex health issue and mobilizes allied professionals to work together to appropriately respond (CCSA, 2013).

As a key pillar of WEC's community drug strategy, the WECOSS Prevention and Education Working Group (PEWG) is well-positioned to lead systems work for SUPHP. As such, the 2025 PEWG project will focus on engaging the community around a comprehensive SUPHP strategy for WEC. This will be fulfilled through a community assessment of local capacities, gaps, priorities, and readiness for collective action and an evidence review of promising prevention and health promotion practices. The [Icelandic Prevention Model \(Planet Youth\)](#), a well-researched model with demonstrated success across many countries, is one model that will be explored for this project. This model is currently being implemented in several areas across Canada through funding provided by Health Canada in early 2024: [Youth Substance Use Prevention Program - Canada.ca](#).

### 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.*

- Increase key community stakeholders' understanding of the current availability, arrangement, and distribution of SUPHP services across WEC.
- Identify community needs, gaps, and priorities for SUPHP and established best practices to meet these needs.
- Solidify community readiness and stakeholder support for a comprehensive, multi-sectoral SUPHP strategy for WEC.
- Develop and acquire community endorsement for a strategic SUPHP plan for the community.

### Strategic Alignment

*Which Modernization Recommendation(s) does this work support?*

- Priority #5: Address the social determinants of health that impact substance use and community well-being.

### Target Audience

*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)?*

- Community service agencies and allied professionals who work or have a vested interest in SUPHP.

## Project Activities

*What activities or deliverables are within scope for this project?*

- Conduct a multi-sectoral community assessment to identify local strengths, needs, priorities, and community readiness for a comprehensive/coordinated SUPHP strategy.
- Complete an evidence review of established best practices at the provincial, national, and international levels for addressing community needs related to SUPHP.
- Use findings from the community consultation and evidence review to plan a strategic community approach with an accompanying evaluation framework for SUPHP.
- Gather local endorsement of the SUPHP strategy for implementation in 2026 and beyond.

## References:

*Canadian Centre for Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA). (2013). Substance Use Prevention and Health Promotion. The Essentials of...Series. Retrieved from <https://www.ccsa.ca/substance-use-prevention-and-health-promotion-essentials-series>.*

*Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy (CDSS). (2024). Prevention and Education. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/canadian-drugs-substances-strategy/prevention-education.html>.*

*Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), University of Waterloo (UOW), & Brock University. (2023-2024). COMPASS Survey Report for the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit.*

*Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU). Substance Use Data Dashboard. Accessed December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.wechu.org/reports/substance-use-0>.*

