



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

WECOSS Harm Reduction Working Group Meeting

**Thursday, November 27th from
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

2025 Project Overview

Building Community For Harm Reduction

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.



Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Template

Status Updates:

- ❖ A Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Template was created for community organizations that work with or support people who use substances.
- ❖ The purpose of the policy template is to provide organizations with a set of standardized procedures and practices that can be used to create inclusive, person-centered, and stigma-free environments.
- ❖ The template is universal in that it can be applied and adapted to a wide range of community service settings, including treatment centres, healthcare facilities, emergency response services, justice-oriented organizations, and others.
- ❖ It is shaped by the guiding principles of harm reduction, trauma and violence-informed practice, equity and inclusion, and collaboration with PWLLE.

Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Template

Preamble

Substance-related mortality, emergency department visits, and hospitalizations have been on the rise in Windsor-Essex County. These outcomes are often linked to substance use disorder and addressing them requires confronting the stigma surrounding this condition. Research shows that stigma is rooted in the misconception that substance use disorder is a personal choice or moral failing (McGinty, E. E., & Barry, C. L. (2020)). Hence, there is a need to shift public perceptions to promote empathy and understanding, ultimately leading to better health outcomes for people who use substances.

Stigma creates barriers at individual, system, and societal levels—preventing people from seeking help, reducing the quality of care they receive, and fueling punitive responses instead of public health solutions. As stigma persists across communities and professional settings, it is critical to promote respect, dignity, and equity. Fostering inclusive, judgment-free environments for people who use substances and/or harm reduction practices can be achieved through education, trauma-informed care, and the use of non-stigmatizing language.

Purpose & Scope

The purpose is to guide [Service Agency/Organization Name] in fostering an environment where people with lived or living experience (PWLLE) of substance use and/or harm reduction are not burdened by stigma that limits access to care or opportunities for upward social mobility, ultimately supporting improvements in their quality of life. [Service Agency/Organization Name] is committed to fostering inclusive, non-judgmental environments for individuals with lived or living experience with substance use and/or harm reduction. Language plays a critical role in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and the quality of care provided. As such, all staff and representatives are expected to avoid terminology that is stigmatizing, inappropriate, or that reinforces negative stereotypes.

Stigmatizing language can contribute to harmful beliefs, discrimination, and barriers to accessing support and services—both within the organization and in the broader community. This policy promotes the consistent use of respectful, person-first language that affirms dignity and supports recovery-oriented care.

Approved terms include, but are not limited to:

- People who use substances
- People with a substance use disorder
- People living with a substance use disorder
- People who use drugs
- People in recovery

These terms can be used in both singular and plural contexts—for example, individual(s), client(s), patient(s), and people who use substances. For a comprehensive list of stigmatizing and non-stigmatizing, substance use–related terms, please refer to [Appendix B](#). For guidance on how these concepts can be implemented in conversation, see [Appendix C](#).

Addressing Stigma E-learning Modules

Status Updates:

- ❖ Two e-learning modules have been developed to support the integration of the policy template into community service environments.
- ❖ Addressing Stigma (Module 1) – The first module is targeted to all staff at community organizations and introduces stigma concepts, use of non-stigmatizing language, and staff roles in fostering stigma-free service environments.
- ❖ Addressing Stigma (Module 2) – The second module is targeted to policy leads at community organizations (e.g., leaders/managers, human resource representatives) and provides an overview of guiding strategies to support implementation of the policy.



The E-learning modules can be accessed directly at <https://learn.wechu.org> and www.wecoss.ca.

Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Workshop

Status Updates:

- ❖ The Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Workshop took place on Wednesday, November 26th from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. at the Caboto Club.
- ❖ The workshop was widely promoted through email invites to WECOSS partners and other community stakeholders and a 2-1-1 email blast.
- ❖ The workshop was co-facilitated by the WECHU's Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction Department and the Welcome Centre Shelter for Women and Families (WCSWF).
- ❖ The session was targeted to policy leads at community organizations and included substance use stigma education, an overview of the Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Template, and guidance on policy implementation.
- ❖ 30 participants from a wide variety of sectors attended the workshop.
- ❖ 100% of post-workshop evaluation survey respondents plan on implementing or recommending the implementation of the policy.

Anti-Stigma Social Media Campaign

Status Updates:

- ❖ To support public understanding and supportive attitudes towards these topics, a public-facing educational campaign has been launched on the WECHU's social media channels with anti-stigma messaging.
- ❖ The content was developed in partnership with the WECHU's Substance Use Peer Advisory Committee to ensure that the perspectives of those with lived/living experience were captured.
- ❖ The campaign consists of eight distinct messages that promote empathy, compassion, and respect for those who use substances.
- ❖ The messages are scheduled to release over the period of October 1st to December 16th on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X.

Call to Action for the WECOSS HRWG: Encourage your organization to amplify the campaign messaging on their social media channels.

WECOSS Action Plan Consultation

Results and Discussion

Recap of WECOSS Action Plan Renewal

Why a New Action Plan for the WECOSS?

✓ It has been almost four years since the WECOSS' action plan was last updated.

✓ The last action plan from 2021 has been addressed through many projects and initiatives.

✓ Community issues and concerns surrounding substance use have greatly evolved since 2021.

✓ Community capacity to address substance use issues has grown significantly over the years.

✓ A new action plan will allow the WECOSS to adapt its plans to meet new needs and address current gaps in the community.

WECOSS Action Plan Consultation

Over the months of September and October, a community consultation was conducted with community partners to guide the development of the new WECOSS Action Plan. Community partners were consulted on the following topics:

Community Strengths

- What is our community and/or the WECOSS currently doing well to address substance use at the community level?
- Where are there existing resources and capacity to support this work?

Community Issues and Concerns

- What are the most pressing issues and concerns currently impacting our community as it relates to substance use?

Community Needs

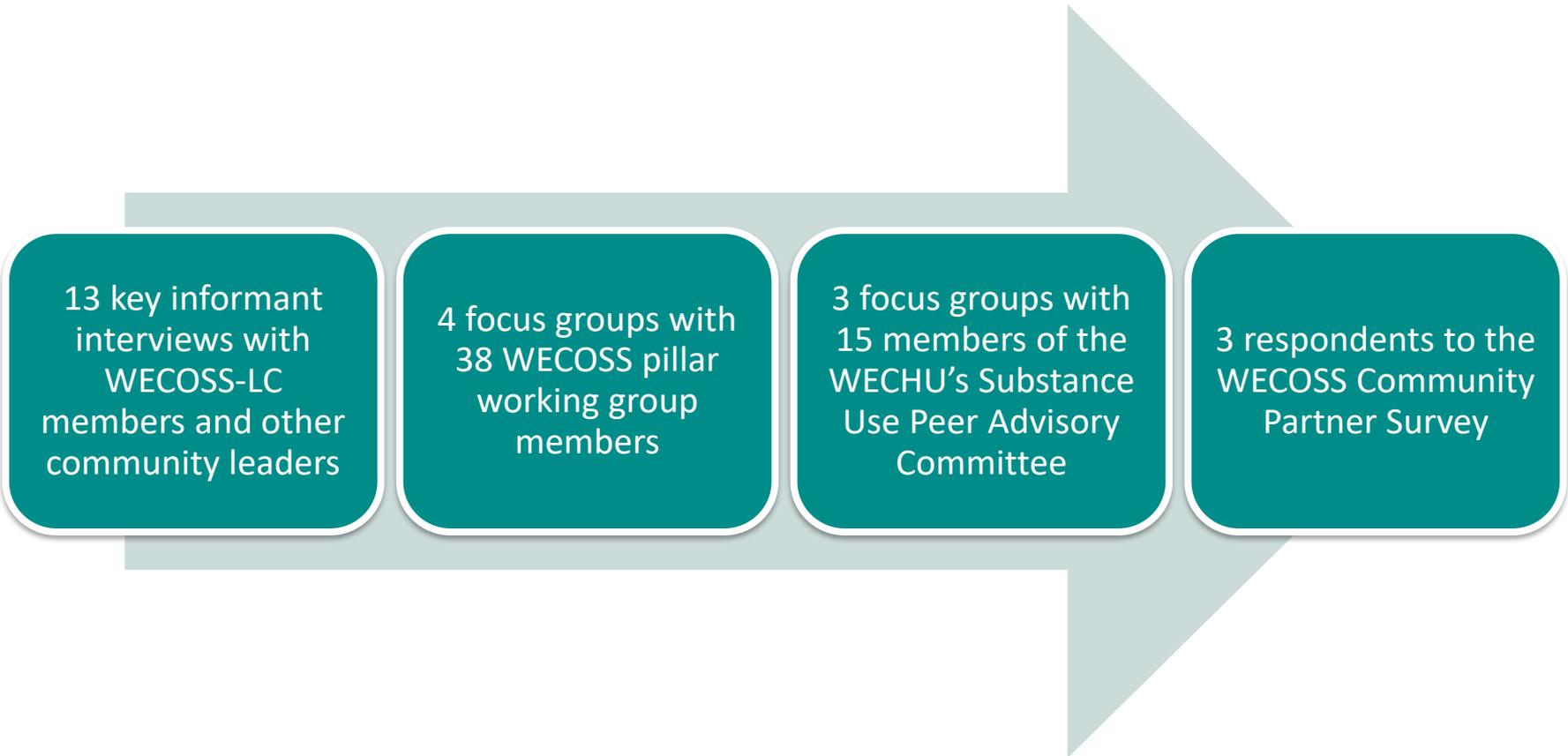
- What community-level actions need to be taken to address substance use in the future?
- What unique gaps in services and supports can the WECOSS help to address?

Community Coordination

- What strategies can be used to improve coordination between the WECOSS and other community groups with similar goals?

WECOSS Action Plan Consultation

Methods



13 key informant interviews with WECOSS-LC members and other community leaders

4 focus groups with 38 WECOSS pillar working group members

3 focus groups with 15 members of the WECHU's Substance Use Peer Advisory Committee

3 respondents to the WECOSS Community Partner Survey

WECOSS Action Plan Consultation Results

Key Community Strengths



**Sustained
collaboration and
diverse
partnerships**



**Data sharing and
communication**



**Harm reduction
and anti-stigma
efforts**



**Education and
prevention**



**Accessible and
transparent
information**



**Community & peer
engagement and
outreach**



Community Safety

WECOSS Action Plan Consultation Results

Pressing Issues, Concerns, and Needs

Stigma and Discrimination

- Service delivery approaches and practices
- Lack of community understanding and misconceptions about substance use and harm reduction

Systems and Policies

- Current legislative frameworks
- Funding and capacity challenges
- Lack of investment in social determinants of health
- Fragmented service systems

Barriers to Access Existing Services

- Wait times
- Transportation barriers
- Geographical gaps in rural communities and outside of downtown core
- Utilization of best practices in service delivery

Service Gaps

- Treatment for youth and justice-involved individuals
- System navigation
- Substance use support in primary care
- Follow-up and aftercare services
- Safer consumption options
- School-aged and family systems supports
- Culturally sensitive and trauma-informed services

WECOSS Action Plan Consultation Results

Summary of Key Priority Areas Identified for WECOSS

Harm Reduction

- Standardize harm reduction practices
- Expand harm reduction efforts to county areas
- Address stigma
- Prioritize trauma and violence-informed care

Prevention & Education

- Early school and family intervention
- Incorporate voices of youth
- Professional development opportunities
- Public awareness campaigns

Data & Accountability

- Increase data and surveillance efforts
- Transparent data sharing
- Increased accountability of organizations

Advocacy & Policy

- Advocate for healthy public policy
- Justice-involved support
- Workforce inclusion for PWLLE
- Streamlining resources

WECOSS Action Plan Consultation Results

Potential Collaboration Opportunities for WECOSS

Community Safety & Well-Being

Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan

Treatment & Recovery

The Mental Health and Addictions Sector Table & Providers of Addiction Treatment Committee

Group Discussion

1. What is your level of agreement with the four priority areas that were identified for the WECOSS?
2. In reviewing the results, is there anything you felt was missed or requires deeper exploration?
3. Of the actions proposed for the Harm Reduction Priority, which are most important to you and the work that you do?