



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Mayor and Members Board of Health
COMMITTEE DATE:	February 19, 2021
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Hamilton Drug Strategy 2020 Year End Report (BOH21002) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

Not Applicable.

INFORMATION

The Hamilton Drug Strategy is a city-wide collaboration to address the harms associated with substance use experienced by individuals, families and the community. The City of Hamilton is a partner in this strategy and provides administrative and community engagement support through a Senior Project Manager and a Health Promotion Specialist.

The goal of the Hamilton Drug Strategy is that all residents of Hamilton are free of harm due to substance use and can enjoy the best quality of life. To achieve this goal, Hamilton Drug Strategy members are collaborating to implement interventions that aim to reduce:

- Substance use related deaths;
- Substance use related overdoses;
- Youth substance use; and,
- Increase diversion from the justice system to the community.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

Work within the Hamilton Drug Strategy is divided into four working groups. The four working groups of the Hamilton Drug Strategy are the:

- Prevention Workgroup;
- Harm Reduction Workgroup;
- Social Justice/Justice Workgroup; and,
- Treatment Workgroup.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Hamilton Drug Strategy in 2020, comment on the impact of COVID-19 on substance use in Hamilton and advise the Board of Health of projected plans for moving forward with the Hamilton Drug Strategy in 2021.

2020 Activities

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Hamilton Drug Strategy was placed on hold in April 2020 to support Public Health Service response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2020, the Hamilton Drug Strategy restarted the Harm Reduction Working Group. This working group is currently meeting on a quarterly basis to share organizational updates related to overdose prevention. In addition, the quarterly newsletter was resumed to keep stakeholders informed of local updates and initiatives throughout Hamilton. The prioritized activities for each of the working groups were:

- **Prevention Workgroup:**
 - Coordinating implementation of training on positive youth development and trauma informed care for youth serving organizations;
 - Implementing standardized cannabis and vaping prevention modules for grades 5-8 classrooms; and,
 - Exploring the Icelandic model for opportunities to implement interventions.
- **Harm Reduction Workgroup:**
 - Increasing the number of individuals revived by naloxone;
 - Evaluating the community impact of the 2019 anti-stigma “See the Person” campaign; and,
 - Implementing anti-stigma training and policies and procedures for organizations.
- **Treatment Workgroup:**
 - Increasing the number of providers screening for alcohol use disorder and opioid use disorders;
 - Implementing evidence informed practices for service providers who treat clients who use Methamphetamines;
 - Implementing anti-stigma training and policies and procedures for organizations; and,

- Increasing completion of outcome measures at specified intervals in order to track effectiveness of treatment.
- **Social Justice/Justice Workgroup:**
 - Increasing the number of substance-use related cases accessing diversion programs;
 - Increasing the number of adults transitioning from the corrections system to community support programs; and,
 - Implementing pilot programs to divert individuals with substance use related to intoxication from the emergency department into withdrawal management services.

Impact of COVID-19 on Substance Use in Hamilton

Problematic substance use continues to be an area of significant public health concern in Hamilton. In 2020, 3445 people visited Hamilton emergency departments for drug misuse or overdose. Among these, 42% were suspected overdoses.

In 2020, Hamilton Paramedic Services responded to fewer incidents related to suspected opioid overdoses, with 565 incidents compared to 596 in 2019. As of July 2020, there have been 67 opioid-related deaths in Hamilton. Since March 2020, with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been a higher number of fatalities associated with opioids. In November 2020, the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network published an analysis of preliminary patterns surrounding opioid-related deaths in Ontario and found that Hamilton was one of four regions in Ontario that had the largest absolute increase in opioid deaths when compared to the pre-pandemic cohort.¹ However, there were fewer opioid-related deaths between January to July of 2020 (67 opioid-related deaths) compared to the same period in the previous year (72 opioid-related deaths).

COVID-19 has impacted how individuals are able to use substances safely within Hamilton. Locally, there are changes to community service provision with some agencies closing to public access as a result of the provincial government guidelines. In addition, social distancing recommendations have limited the availability of social networks and safe spaces for individuals who use substances. These changes can increase the frequency of individuals using substances alone; which increases the risk of adverse events from substance use. There are also reports of an increase in the

¹ Ontario Drug Policy Research Network; Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario/Ontario Forensic Pathology Service; Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario); Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation. Preliminary Patterns in Circumstances Surrounding Opioid-Related Deaths in Ontario during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Toronto, ON: Ontario Drug Policy Research Network; 2020.

toxicity of the drug supply during the pandemic further impacting the safety of individuals using substances.²

Hamilton Drug Strategy in 2021

The Hamilton Drug Strategy will remain on hold until at least the end of Q1 2021 in order to support the Public Health Services response to COVID-19.

Public Health Services continues to collaborate with community partners in the provision of harm reduction programming throughout Hamilton. To increase access to harm reduction supplies, Public Health Services has worked to expand the provision of harm reduction supplies at community agencies throughout Hamilton, expand daytime hours on the needle exchange van and increase community partners providing naloxone. Public Health Services staff are also continuing to work on an application for a second consumption and treatment services (CTS) site in Hamilton.

In addition, the Public Health Services early warning system continues to operate on a weekly basis. This system monitors and surveys community partners on a weekly basis and along with Emergency Medical Services call data allows Public Health Services to identify emerging trends within the community to notify providers.

In closing, problematic substance use remains an area of public health concern in Hamilton. Hamilton Public Health Services will continue to collaborate with community partners to address challenges that arise due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is committed to re-engaging the Hamilton Drug Strategy stakeholders to continue planned activities in 2021.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Not Applicable.

² Ontario Drug Policy Research Network; Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario/Ontario Forensic Pathology Service; Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario); Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation. Preliminary Patterns in Circumstances Surrounding Opioid-Related Deaths in Ontario during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Toronto, ON: Ontario Drug Policy Research Network; 2020.