



# INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor and Members Public Health Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	June 3, 2024
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Update on the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan – June 2024 (BOH24015) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
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<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

## COUNCIL DIRECTION

At its meeting on June 12, 2023 the Public Health Committee approved the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan (Public Health Committee Report BOH23021). The Plan included a commitment to report progress back to Public Health Committee.

## INFORMATION

### Hamilton Opioid Action Plan

To address on-going problematic opioid use and the increasingly toxic drug supply in Hamilton, several local actions have been initiated over the past 18 months. Critical among these actions include the declaration of an emergency in the areas of opioids, mental health, and homelessness in April 2023, and the subsequent development of the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan (Public Health Committee Report BOH23021) which was approved by the Public Health Committee on June 12, 2023.

The Hamilton Opioid Action Plan was developed by subcontractor MASS LBP through consultation with the Hamilton Drug Strategy Steering Committee, community members, persons with lived/living experience, equity-deserving groups, and health and social services leaders. Throughout the consultation period participants clearly articulated the need for the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan to be bold and to present recommendations for immediate action. The plan includes 13 actions that are evidence-informed, feasible, and will help to achieve the goals of the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan.

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The goals of the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan are:

1. Reduce the number of deaths associated with opioid use;
2. Reduce the harms associated with opioid use; and,
3. Increase access to a spectrum of treatment options.

The Hamilton Opioid Action Plan aims to achieve these actions by providing a mix of tangible and achievable short and long-term actions, using data collection and evaluation while enhancing collaboration across community partners.

### **Immediate Actions**

The immediate actions outlined in the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan were targeted to be initiated at four months. These actions were selected for an immediate timeframe as prerequisites to move the overall Hamilton Opioid Action Plan forward, an urgent need identified by the community and actions that could be scaled to available funding. The following were identified as immediate actions in the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan:

#### **1. Establish an Opioid Action Table**

The Hamilton Opioid Action Table is an action-focused and operational working group committed to enhancing community coordination and collaboration to collectively address the drug poisoning crisis in Hamilton through tactical implementation of the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan. The Hamilton Opioid Action Table is accountable to the Hamilton Drug Strategy Steering Committee. Members representing community and municipal stakeholders were nominated by the Hamilton Drug Strategy Steering Committee to participate from the following sectors:

- People with lived/lived experience (Two);
- African, Caribbean, and Black community (One);
- Indigenous community (Two);
- Community agencies (One);
- Health systems agencies (One);
- Hospital services (One);
- City Housing (One);
- Community housing/ emergency shelters (Two);
- Primary care (One); and,
- Public Health (One).

Representatives were identified and confirmed for most sectors/communities including a late addition representing first responders to provide insight and support for medium term actions. The table was unable to secure representation from primary care and the African, Caribbean, and Black community. Public Health Services staff consulted with multiple agencies to provide representation

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for these groups. Members of these groups were unable to commit to Hamilton Opioid Action Table membership due to competing priorities and limited capacity.

The first meeting of the Hamilton Opioid Action Table was held on October 25, 2023. Meetings, initiated on a bi-weekly basis and transitioned to a monthly interval upon the establishment of medium-term working groups. These meetings drive the action items outlined in the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan. The meetings also serve as an opportunity to connect stakeholders from across the sector to collaborate and share updates, information, and data in a timely manner.

## **2. Scale up Supervised Consumption Sites across Hamilton**

In August 2023 a call for applications was launched for a safe consumption site within the men’s emergency shelter system in Hamilton. Upon receiving no applications, the men’s shelter system was consulted and put forth an alternative proposal for use of funds originally approved for a safe consumption site. On January 15, 2024, the Public Health Committee directed Public Health Services staff to consult with the Hamilton Opioid Action Table and Hamilton Drug Strategy Steering Committee to endorse an alternate proposal for use of aforementioned funds. On April 10, 2024, Council carried a motion to transfer funds for the following initiatives:

- Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) Hamilton’s Safer Use Space;
- Embedded Harm Reduction Pilot in Men’s Emergency Shelters; and,
- Peer Support Worker initiative.

These initiatives aim to provide low-barrier harm reduction services to individuals disproportionately impacted by the mental health, homelessness, and opioid state of emergency in Hamilton.

## **3. Develop “Safer Use” Policies in Hospitals and Care Setting**

The development of safer use policies in hospitals and care settings is led by the hospital services representative at the Hamilton Opioid Action Table. This action seeks to engage hospitals and care settings to become a more supportive environment for people who use substances to receive care. The new Management of Illicit Substances policy developed at St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton has been supported and is currently in the approval process by their Patient Experience, Quality and Patient Safety Improvement Committee. This committee includes people with lived/living experience with substance use. Upon approval, the policy will be rolled out using change management strategies at all St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton locations. This policy takes a humanistic and harm reduction approach to meet people where they are at in relation to their substance use, respect patient autonomy, and prioritize patient and staff safety.

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This is facilitated by assessing the risk associated with each case of nonprescribed substance use, taking measures to reduce harms to the patient, and where possible, reducing unnecessary interactions with security services. St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton is working to expand the reach of safer use practices by exploring potential hospital based safer use spaces and working with Hamilton Health Sciences to support the development of their own safer use policy.

**4. Increase the Availability of Drug-Checking Services and Resources**

Public Health Services has developed a Drug Test Strip Kit Distribution Pilot. The pilot is a 12-month program that will engage local harm reduction service partners to distribute fentanyl test strips and xylazine test strips to people who use substances in the community. The objectives of this program are to increase community access to harm reduction tools and increase community awareness/knowledge of the unregulated drug supply. This pilot also provides a positive opportunity for service providers to connect with clients and discuss harm reduction strategies.

This pilot program will distribute test strips in kits of five, along with testing accessories and instructions developed by Public Health Services with the support of the test strip manufacturer. To support this pilot, Public Health Services has developed a train the trainer program for disseminating key information about drug test strips, client education and distribution. All agencies/teams participating in the pilot will have trained staff. By the end of May 2024, 27 Public Health Services and The Aids Network staff will have received training for this program. At program launch, community members will be able to pick-up kits at the following locations: the Van Needle Syringe Program, Street Health Clinics, and at the Mental Health and Street Outreach Program. The program will scale up to include additional agencies and locations for test strip distribution over time.

Though this pilot was initiated during the fall of 2023, delays in the procurement of the necessary supplies for the test strip kits resulted in a deferral on the implementation of this action. Now that all supplies have been obtained, a distribution start date has been scheduled for May 13, 2024.

Public Health Services staff have also begun preliminary discussion and research on the procurement of a drug checking surveillance option, such as a point of care device. Several community partners have been consulted to gauge interest and feasibility. Guidance has also been provided to staff by the Toronto Drug Checking Service, a provincial leader in drug checking surveillance. Next steps for Public Health Services staff will be exploring drug checking surveillance models and technology for alignment with Hamilton's local context.

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**5. Engage and Support Primary Care Providers**

This action has not been initiated to date. Due to capacity issues, the primary care sector was unable to participate in the Hamilton Opioid Action Table and support the implementation of this action. This action is currently paused and may be revisited when there is capacity from the primary care sector to support this action.

**Medium-Term Actions**

The medium-term actions in the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan are targeted to be initiated at six months. These action areas require additional cross sector collaboration through action oriented working groups. The following were identified as Medium-Term actions in the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan:

**6. Clarify service pathways and options for individuals who use substances, care providers, and first responders**

This action is led by the first responder representative at the Hamilton Opioid Action Table. Other members of this working group include members representing hospital services, health systems agencies, and people with lived/living experience. This working group is in the process of identifying activities and developing a work plan to execute this action. This action aims to develop accessible resources for first responders to be able to link people who use substances to services, and increase awareness of service pathways to hospital staff, first responders, people who use substances and their support networks.

**7. Develop and implement new youth prevention programs**

Public Health Services is leading action on new youth prevention programs in alignment with 2024 strategic priority work in mental health and substance use as well as ongoing work of the City of Hamilton Youth Strategy. This work identifies youth mental well-being as a priority action area with the goal of increasing resiliency, development of healthy coping strategies and promotion of mental health and well-being among youth in the middle years. In 2024, Public Health Services staff will develop a plan to address risk and protective factors among youth in the middle years. The Hamilton Opioid Action Table and Hamilton Drug Strategy will continue to collaborate with strategies such as the Hamilton Youth Strategy on initiatives addressing youth substance use.

**8. Expand supports available to families**

This action is led by the women's community housing/emergency shelter representative at the Hamilton Opioid Action Table. Working group members include representatives of hospital services, health systems agencies, and people with lived/living experience. The working group is in the process of identifying activities and developing a work plan to execute this action. This

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action aims to expand supports available to families, particularly children of people who use substances, pregnant women who use substances, and those grieving the loss of loved ones affected by opioid-related deaths. This work will also promote the integration of destigmatizing practices to health and social services agencies that serve these populations.

**9. Increase access and support to shelters and drop-ins**

This action is led by the men’s community housing/emergency shelter representative. Working group members include representatives of the Indigenous community, health systems agencies and the women’s community housing/ emergency shelter. This action aims to address barriers to access for shelters and drop-ins. One identified barrier is the high staff turnover in the shelter and people serving sector which results in limited real-time knowledge of available services to support people who use substances. This working group is currently developing a plan for ongoing staff awareness that will target increasing the systems knowledge of new staff. The plan is to re-initiate a system service tour where individuals across the broader people serving systems would be able to participate in scheduled guided visits to the shelters and drop-in services across the city. This is an activity that has been done with success prior to the pandemic and would provide front line staff with opportunities to learn about available services in-person, meet with program staff, and enhance efforts to connect clients to the right service or support for their situation. This activity will also promote connection and collaboration among service providers.

**Long-Term Actions**

The long-term actions outlined in the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan are intended to be initiated at twelve months. Due to the system level scope of the long-term actions additional support will be required from the Hamilton Drug Strategy.

**10. Increase the number of physicians able to prescribe opioid agonist therapy (OAT) and safer supply programs**

- Increase the number of physicians able to prescribe opioid agonist therapy and safer supply programs with sufficient training and support;
- In partnership with relevant stakeholders, collaboratively advocate to municipal, provincial, and federal governments for more safer supply initiatives; and,
- Support existing safer supply programs.

**11. Expand the availability of stabilization services**

- Expand the availability of rapid stabilization for persons who use substances with high risk (of death) in hospital;
- Extend the capacity and operating hours of existing rapid access addiction medicine (RAAM) clinics; and,

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- Develop youth-specific rapid access addiction medicine clinic pathways and spaces.

**12. Increase access to rapid detox and residential treatment programs**

- Expand the availability of rapid detox programs and residential treatment programs;
- Work to reduce long wait times to access both rapid detox and residential treatment programs; and,
- Ensure detox programs are equipped with the resources to support clients or have the means to refer clients to resources to bridge the transition to residential treatment programs and afterward.

**13. Develop additional Supervised Consumption Sites throughout Hamilton**

- Investigate the long-term expansion of Supervised Consumption Sites through partnerships with hospitals, shelters, and other community organizations in Hamilton; and,
- Collaborate and support organizations with existing Supervised Consumption Sites to expand their capacity and service offerings.

**Conclusion**

The work of the Hamilton Opioid Action Plan is well underway, supported by the Hamilton Opioid Action Table to reduce deaths and harms associated with opioid use and increase access to a spectrum of treatment options. Implementation of immediate actions are bringing a range of harm reduction resources to priority populations, strengthening relationships between and among municipal services and community partners, and driving harm reduction policy improvements in local hospitals. The progress made through these actions has set the foundation for the collaborative efforts of the action oriented working groups required to execute the medium-term actions. Long-term actions will continue to build on these successes at the system level to provide people who use substances in Hamilton with lifesaving and life changing supports and services.

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Not Applicable.