

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health
DATE: 2017 December 14

EXPANDING OPIOID RESPONSE AS CRISIS GROWS

Recommendation

That the Board of Health:

- 1) Receive Report No. 076-17 re: Expanding Opioid Response as Crisis Grows; and***
- 2) Direct Health Unit staff to apply to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for an Opioid Prevention Site (OPS) in London in response to the public health emergency here and across the Province.***

Key Points

- There were 336 opioid-related deaths in Ontario from May to July 2017, compared with 201 during the same time period in 2016, representing a 68 per cent increase in the province.
- From July to September 2017, there were 2,449 emergency department visits in Ontario related to opioid overdoses, compared with 1,896 in the three-months prior, representing a 29 per cent increase.

Background

The Health Unit's Incident Management System (IMS) was activated by the Medical Officer of Health September 25, 2017 to enhance the response to the community drug crisis (see Report No. 054-17).

On December 7, 2017, in response to a Coroner's Report that identified a stark increase in the number of opioid overdose deaths in Ontario, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care announced additional measures to address the opioid crisis. The Province will be providing naloxone to police and fire services in addition to seeking from the federal government an expanded ability to address overdoses, as new data shows that opioid-related deaths continue to increase. There was a 68 per cent increase in opioid-related deaths in Ontario from May to July 2017 as compared to the same time period the year prior (336 vs 201). From July to September 2017, there were 2,449 emergency department visits related to opioid overdoses, compared with 1,896 in the three-months prior, representing a 29 per cent increase.

In addition to these measures, Ontario is also improving access to comprehensive care for people living with addictions by opening new Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) clinics and expanding the services and hours of operation of existing RAAM clinics. These clinics provide immediate help and short-term addictions treatment, as well as counselling, until they can be connected to longer-term holistic support in their community. More than 30 communities across Ontario will benefit from new or expanded RAAM clinics.

Ontario has established an Opioid Emergency Task Force that includes front-line workers and people with lived experience to strengthen the province's coordinated response to the opioid crisis. Over the next three years, Ontario will invest more than \$222 million to combat the opioid crisis in Ontario, including expanding harm reduction services, hiring more front-line staff and improving access to addictions supports across the province.

The government has also committed to invest \$20 million annually in Ontario's Chronic Pain Network. Ontario is working with Health Quality Ontario and other partner organizations to provide customized prescribing data, mentoring, education and other supports for physicians to share best practices for supporting

people with opioid use disorder, and to promote safe opioid prescribing and effective approaches to managing pain.

Expansion of Naloxone

Naloxone is a medication that can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose. Naloxone kits will now be offered to all 61 police services across the province, including municipal and First Nation police services and the Ontario Provincial Police. The kits will also be made available to all 447 municipal fire departments (full-time, composite, and volunteer fire departments, all northern fire departments, as well as all First Nations fire services) to prevent overdoses, and could also be used to help front-line police and firefighters in case of exposure. Naloxone kits are currently available to the public for free at participating pharmacies and from eligible community and health organizations.

Since the enhancement of the Harm Reduction Program in August 2017, there have been 573 Kits distributed to eligible community organizations in Middlesex-London. This helps to ensure that there are numerous locations where naloxone can be provided to respond to overdoses for those who are most at risk.

Opioid Prevention Sites

The federal government recently announced changes to policy that would expand the ability of provinces to respond to the escalating opioid crisis. Under the new federal policy, provinces experiencing a public health emergency will be able to request an exemption under federal law for temporary overdose prevention sites.

In response to this federal change in policy, Minister Hoskins wrote a letter to the Federal Health Minister to formally request that the federal government allow Ontario to approve and fund overdose prevention sites. These overdose prevention sites would provide necessary health services that are accessible and free of stigma to help reduce the growing number of overdose deaths affecting some of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in the province. Establishing overdose prevention sites with a federal exemption would also protect front-line workers at these sites from criminal prosecution. [Appendix A](#) details the differences between Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) and Supervised Consumption Facilities (SCF).

As part of the local work towards an application for federal exemption from the Controlled Drug and Substances Act (CDSA) to allow for one or more Supervised Consumption Facilities (SCFs), ten formal community consultations and four focus groups were conducted throughout the month of November. Feedback from these engagement efforts was positive. Data analysis has started on the information gathered at the public consultations and preliminary results from that feedback will be available next week. An on-line survey was made available at the beginning of November and will remain open until December 15, 2017. Almost 2000 people have completed the online survey, and initial results and feedback have been favourable.

Conclusion/Next Steps

The Ministry is currently working on the details of what the OPS program will look like in Ontario. MLHU, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC), London Intercommunity Health Centre (LIHC), and other key community partners are planning in earnest for an OPS in London in the near future. MLHU has identified sites that could be used for OPS if urgently needed, one of which may be acceptable in the long-term as an SCF. MLHU may be the lead agency for an SCF federal exemption application, though the operation would be in partnership with other agencies. MLHU is in the process of sourcing, and potentially purchasing, some of the basic equipment and supplies that would be needed for an OPS.

This report was submitted by the Sexual Health Team, Environmental Health & Infectious Disease Division.



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