

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa
3 April 2017 / 3 avril 2017**

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**Submitted by
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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2017-OPH-CP-0001

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON OPIOIDS AND THE RISK OF UNINTENTIONAL
OVERDOSES IN OTTAWA**

**OBJET: POINT D'INFORMATION SUR LES OPIOÏDES ET LE RISQUE DE
SURDOSE ACCIDENTELLE À OTTAWA**

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit:

- 1. Receive for information the updates outlined in this report with respect to Ottawa Public Health actions related to opioids and the risk of unintentional overdoses in Ottawa; and**
- 2. Approve that the Chair of the Board of Health and the Medical Officer of Health send a joint letter to the federal government in support of Bill C-224, the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act*.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa :

- 1. prenne acte des points d'information présentés dans ce rapport relativement aux mesures de Santé publique Ottawa concernant les opioïdes et le risque de surdose accidentelle à Ottawa;**
- 2. autorise le président du Conseil de santé et le médecin chef en santé publique à envoyer une lettre conjointe au gouvernement fédéral en appui au projet de loi C 224, intitulé la Loi sur les bons samaritains secourant les victimes de surdose.**

BACKGROUND

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) has worked with partners for more than 2 years, to form a multi-agency Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force (ODPRTF). Recently, the ODPRTF's key activities focused on:

- Creating an "Early Identification and Notification of Stakeholders Related to High Risk Drug Situations" distribution list, intended to improve communications;
- Developing protocols and joint awareness messaging for use in advance of large public gatherings;
- Promoting access to and training for naloxone through existing partnerships; and
- Launching the www.StopOverdoseOttawa.ca campaign to increase awareness and align messages.

Most recently, the ODPRTF has developed an interagency Opioid Cluster Response protocol, enhanced local surveillance and monitoring of overdose data, provided guidance on enhancing Naloxone distribution in the community, expanded its membership, and created a communications sub-group to further coordinate public messaging related to overdoses and to allow for rapid coordinated emergency communications.

On February 13, 2017 OPH and the Ottawa Police Services (OPS) issued a joint [alert](#) to warn residents about counterfeit prescription medications found in the city and on February 23rd, as a result of increased community and media interests, OPH initiated an enhanced response to ensure adequate resources were in place to respond to the increased demand for more information on the opioid issue.

Since issuing the joint alert with OPS on February 13th, OPH has provided the Board and City Council with updates with respect to efforts and developments related to opioids and the risk of unintentional overdoses in Ottawa. Further, OPH has worked with the City Manager's office to support a coordinated City-wide response to the risk of opioid overdose in Ottawa.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with more detailed information with respect to recent OPH activities.

DISCUSSION

Since initiating the enhanced response on February 23, 2017, OPH efforts have focused on supporting the community, notably parents and schools, with information needs about opioids and overdose risk, refining the Interagency Opioid Overdose Cluster Response Plan, developing a "real-time" overdose surveillance system for Ottawa to better inform action, and working with municipal and community partners to build on past efforts in developing a broader Ottawa Plan to address addictions and overdose risks.

Messaging About Opioids and Overdoses

OPH has worked closely with ODPRTF partners, schools and school boards to enhance communications and the dissemination of information to the public, parents and youth. In particular, OPH has:

- sent factsheets, via all four schoolboards and our various communication platforms, to parents, teachers, and students regarding opioids and overdoses;
- worked on developing youth-informed messaging within high schools to effectively reach youth with messaging about substance misuse and mental health;
- trained 80 staff on messaging to parents, naloxone, opioid, and overdose information;
- provided training and knowledge exchange related to opioids, overdose prevention and naloxone to school staff and community partners reaching almost 300;
- attended almost 20 community and school events related to opioids awareness, reaching over 1700 residents; and

- responded to several dozen media inquiries specifically related to opioids, overdoses and naloxone.

Messaging has been primarily focused on:

- The fact that illicit fentanyl is present in our community in the form of counterfeit pills made to look like pharmaceutical-grade drugs and that youth are overdosing;
- The importance of being able to quickly recognize the signs and symptoms of an overdose, calling 9-1-1 and having a naloxone kit available to temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose while waiting for paramedics or first responders to arrive;
- The availability of naloxone through pharmacies (a list produced by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care of Ottawa pharmacies dispensing naloxone is available on Ottawa.ca);
- Drawing attention to an online portal that includes updated and relevant information about counterfeit pills, overdose prevention, naloxone kits, local treatment resources, and other information for parents: StopOverdoseOttawa.ca;
- Mental health resources and guides for parents on “How to talk to kids about drugs”; and
- Raising awareness that one quarter of high school students say it would be easy to get prescription pain pills without a prescription, and 13% of Grades 7 to 12 students had used prescription opioids non-medically in the past year. Two-thirds of them got the drug from home.

Interagency Opioid Overdose Cluster Response Plan

OPH, in collaboration with partners from the ODPRTF, has developed an *Ottawa Interagency Opioid Overdose Cluster Response Plan* in order to be prepared to quickly respond in the event of a cluster of opioid overdoses in Ottawa. The plan outlines the operational response of the partner organisations to clusters of opioid overdoses in the city, and is available for review on request from the Board Secretary.

Other jurisdictions in Canada have seen large clusters of overdoses in a short period of time, often associated with the distribution of counterfeit drugs in the community. Most notably, in July 2016 Surrey, British Columbia reported 36 suspected overdoses in

approximately 48 hours. Similar clusters have been seen in multiple cities across the United States, including Philadelphia, San Francisco and Louisville.

The Ontario Public Health Standards define the requirements for the Emergency Preparedness Program within all public health units, to ensure a consistent and effective response to public health emergencies and emergencies with public health impacts. This standard states that each public health unit shall develop its emergency response plan, in consultation with community partners and governmental bodies, to address the identified hazards for which the board of health and medical officer of health have a lead role in responding to, consistent with an Incident Management System and in accordance with the [Public Health Emergency Preparedness Protocol, 2008 \(MOHLTC, 2015\)](#). Accordingly, the *Plan* aligns with the MOHLTC's Opioid strategy and is based on the key functions of emergency management: Prevention; Preparedness; Response; and Recovery.

Within each phase, a functional approach is used to define the roles and responsibilities of all ODPRTF partners.

The plan's **Prevention** phase concerns the following activities:

- Increase awareness of potential harms of opioids and what measures can be taken to reduce risks;
- Expand access and distribution of naloxone;
- Expand overdose prevention and response tools as well as information on mental health and addictions resources to primary care physicians;
- Timely, early identification and notification of stakeholders when new information about overdose risk arises; and
- Additional information about substance misuse, surveillance status reports and tools to give patients and parents on opioids.

The **Preparedness** phase involves defining the indicators and measures for enhanced surveillance, the triggers to activate enhanced and emergency response functions and the risk communication strategy.

In the **Response** phase, individual task force member organizations will declare whether they are in enhanced or activated response mode. Each organization will follow their usual processes for escalation, notification and activation of their emergency response plans. When multiple organizations declare they are in an enhanced or

emergency response mode, an incident management structure will be put in place, based on the requirements of each of the participating organizations and in alignment with the *Interagency Opioid Overdose Cluster Response Plan*.

In the **Recovery** phase, partners will de-escalate, return to normal operations and evaluate the response. Recovery operations typically begin concurrently with, or shortly after activation of the response to ensure the availability of data and input into the evaluation and improvement of future plans.

“Real-time” overdose surveillance system

OPH, in collaboration with partners from the ODPRTF, has been developing a “real-time” overdose surveillance system for Ottawa. The goal of the system is to be able to identify an increase or change in overdose activity sufficiently rapidly to enable timely alerting and effective responses. Better quality and more timely overdose statistics will allow Ottawa to respond to increased risk in the community in a coordinated and targeted manner.

Progress to date includes:

- An overdose surveillance plan (an appendix to the *Ottawa Interagency Opioid Overdose Cluster Response Plan*) has been developed in alignment with provincial and national efforts. The plan identifies relevant data sources and indicators of overdose activity in Ottawa.
- Partnerships have been strengthened to allow for data sharing with OPH (e.g. paramedic and police responses to suspected overdoses, emergency department visits, deaths). Through discussions with partners, OPH continues to work to make data available to the public, while ensuring that personal health information is maintained.
- Improved situational awareness of overdose activity and reporting to ODPRTF members.

Ottawa Plan to Address Opioid Overdose Risks

Following a March 6, 2017 meeting between the Mayor of Ottawa and the Premier of Ontario, the Premier indicated the province was prepared to work to ensure Ottawa had the resources needed to support a local plan to deal with opioid addiction and overdoses. Since this announcement, OPH has been working with the City Manager’s Office and other municipal partners and health care planning partners towards an

enhanced and coordinated city/community partnership addressing substance misuse in Ottawa.

Elements in discussion include addressing needs of parents, teachers and youth; improving data for informed responses to changing risk in the community; enhancing access to naloxone; increasing public awareness and education; aligning treatment options with community need; protecting the community from exposure to illicit substances; and enabling a sustained coordinated approach.

Recommendation #2 – Bill C-224, the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act*

On February 9, 2017, Dr. Levy testified before the Senate's Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in support of Bill C-224 – *The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* to amend the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*. The proposed Bill would provide an exemption from possession of substance charges for Canadians seeking medical or law enforcement assistance when a person is suffering from an overdose.

The presentation to the Senate Standing Committee highlighted that early actions taken by a Good Samaritan can improve health outcomes in the event of an overdose by buying time for emergency responders to arrive on scene. It referred to information that the majority of overdoses occur in the presence of another person,ⁱ yet less than half of the people who witness an overdose call 9-1-1.ⁱⁱ When emergency medical services are not called following an overdose there is an increased risk of death, even if the antidote naloxone is given to reverse an overdose caused by opioids, because naloxone is short-acting compared to the effect of the drugs causing the overdose.

In Ottawa Public Health's Peer Overdose Prevention Program less than one third of the trained peers who reported using a naloxone kit between 2012 and 2016 had also called 9-1-1. People report various barriers to calling for help in a situation of an opioid overdose, including fear of being arrested and fear of being found in breach of probation or parole.ⁱⁱⁱ Bill C-224 aims to reduce these barriers.

Current status of Bill C-224

The Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs has released their report on Bill C-224 after two hearings on the Bill. There was strong support from Senators and amendments have been proposed to strengthen the Bill. The rules and process are such that, making amendments to this Bill would result in delaying its consideration when it goes back to the House of Commons, which could result in it ultimately dying on

the order paper. For this reason, the Senate Standing Committee, noting its strong support for the intent of the bill, encourages that the Senate and the House of Commons consider the proposed amendments expeditiously, so that the measures in the bill may be implemented as quickly as possible.

Given the uncertainty with respect to the fate of Bill C-224, as described above, OPH is recommending that the Chair of the Board of Health and the Medical Officer of Health write a joint letter to the bill sponsor and Ministers of Health; Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness; and Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth with a copy to all local Members of Parliament, advocating for prompt and positive action to enact this legislation.

NEXT STEPS

The Board of Health will continue to be apprised of pertinent developments.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no rural implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

Ottawa Public Health continues to work with municipal and community partners on the various activities and initiatives described in this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to receiving this report for information and implementing recommendation #2.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

To date, OPH has been managing resources internally through staff training and re-allocation, as needed. OPH has been tracking staff time, overtime and other resources dedicated to enhanced response efforts and will pursue any opportunities for additional funding and/or cost recovery.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

This report supports City Council's priorities with respect to: Healthy and Caring Communities; Governance, Planning & Decision Making; and Financial Sustainability.

This report also supports the Ottawa Board of Health's strategic priorities with respect to: Fostering Mental Health in Our Community; Advancing Healthy Public Policy; and Developing an Adaptive Workforce.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Document 1 - Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force (ODPRTF)
Membership List

DISPOSITION

Upon approval of the report, the Chair and Medical Officer of Health will action recommendation #2.

Document 1 - Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force (ODPRTF)
Membership List

Ottawa Public Health

Champlain LHIN

Local hospitals (Queensway-Carleton, The Ottawa Hospital, The Royal Hospital, Montfort, CHEO)

Ottawa Police Service

Ottawa Paramedic Service

Ottawa Fire Service

OC Transpo

Regional Coroner

Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre

Ottawa-Carleton Pharmacists Association

Mark Barnes

Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres

Direction Santé Publique – Gatineau

Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services

ⁱ Bohnert, A. S. B., Tracy, M., & Galea, S. (2012). Characteristics of drug users who witness many overdoses: Implications for overdose prevention. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 120(1-3), 168–173. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2011.07.018>

ⁱⁱ Follet, K. et al (2012) Between Life and Death: The Barriers to Calling 911 During an Overdose Emergency <http://preventingcrime.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/911Report.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Follet, K. et al (2014) Barriers to Calling 911 in Overdose Emergencies In a Canadian Context. http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/system/files/Follett_Piscitelli_Parkinson_Munger_2014.pdf