

MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

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

DESTINATAIRE : Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa

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SUBJECT: OTTAWA OVERDOSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TASK FORCE:
UPDATE

OBJET : GROUPE DE TRAVAIL D'OTTAWA SUR LA PRÉVENTION DES SURDOSES
ET LES INTERVENTIONS EN LA MATIÈRE – MISE À JOUR

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Board of Health (BOH) with an update on the work of the Ottawa Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force (ODPRTF) and Ottawa Public Health's (OPH) role in preparing and responding to opioid overdoses.

BACKGROUND

The ODPRTF was created in September 2014, following a series of overdoses linked to large music festivals during the summer of 2014. At that time, OPH gathered a group of community partners to discuss how organizations can enhance inter-agency preparedness, collaboration, response and communication relating to the risk of overdoses at large public gatherings.

Currently, the ODPRTF includes representation from the following organizations:

- OPH (Chair)
- Regional Coroner
- Ottawa Police Services
- Ottawa Paramedic Services
- Ottawa Carleton Pharmacists Association
- Sexual Assault and Partners Abuse Care Program
- The Ottawa Hospital
- The Montfort Hospital
- OC Transpo
- Respect Pharmacy
- The Royal Hospital
- Community Health Centre and Resource Centres

Since its inception, the key activities of the ODPRTF have been:

- The creation of an “Early Identification and Notification of Stakeholders Related to High Risk Drug Situations” distribution list, which allows agencies to rapidly advise one another regarding emerging issues in the community related to drug use. This notification process has been used five times since it was created.
- Joint media and public awareness messaging prior to known large public gatherings. Examples include the following:
 - [Ottawa police, health groups warn of Halloween drug dangers](#)
 - [Ottawa Public Health warns of overdose, sex assault risks as frosh week approaches](#)
- Promotion of Naloxone training and access through existing partnerships such as the Ontario Pharmacy Naloxone Program and OPH’s Peer Overdose Prevention Program. (Naloxone is a medication that temporarily reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.)
- The launch of the www.StopOverdoseOttawa.ca campaign, which is a partnership between OPH, Ottawa Paramedic Services, Ottawa Police Services, Respect

Pharmacy, the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group, the Ottawa Hospital and the Ottawa-Carleton Pharmacist Association.

OPH has taken a leadership role with ODPRTF as it aligns with the [Ontario Public Health Emergency Preparedness Protocol](#), which specifically states that a Board of Health shall:

- Identify and assess the relevant hazards and risks to the public's health;
- 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 will have a lead role in responding;
- In collaboration with community partners, increase public awareness regarding emergency preparedness activities;
- Interpret and use surveillance data to communicate information on risks to relevant audiences.

In June, 2016, the BOH approved a report titled received the "[Enhanced Harm Reduction Services In Ottawa – Data, Guiding Principle And Next Steps](#)", which outlined that, at that time, an average of 33 Ottawa residents died each year from unintentional drug overdose. Of these deaths, approximately two-thirds were due to opioids such as fentanyl, oxycodone, and morphine. Recommendations were adopted to expand access to naloxone and to request partner agencies pursue evidence-informed enhancements to harm reduction services.

The report also outlined OPH's continued need to coordinate efforts with stakeholders to implement "strategies aimed at expanding access to naloxone for all people in Ottawa who use opioids, not just those who inject, and to work with pharmacies to ensure access to free naloxone for all Ottawa residents."

The ODPRTF also aligns with OPH's strategic direction to *Foster Mental Health in our Community*. The strategic initiative, which seeks to reduce harms from prescription medications, outlines OPH's role in working with partners to support best practice initiatives relating to safe prescribing, dispensing and appropriate use and disposal of opioids.

DISCUSSION

In 2016, British Columbia (BC) recorded 914 deaths from illicit drug overdose, the highest number in a single year ever recorded in the province. In April 2016, the B.C. Provincial Health Officer declared a public health emergency under B.C.'s Public Health Act in response to this significant increase in the number of opioid overdose deaths across the province, primarily due to fentanyl and carfentanil. In July 2016, BC Premier Christy Clark announced the establishment of a Joint Task Force on Overdose Prevention and Response to lead an integrated response to the emergency across the public health and public safety sectors. Over 16,000 naloxone kits were distributed in 2016 through the province's Take Home naloxone program, community-based organizations are stocking naloxone and have staff trained to administer, and the majority of law enforcement agencies have now equipped and trained their members to administer intranasal naloxone.

In Ottawa, there are different methods to access naloxone, including through the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's Ontario Naloxone Pharmacy Program and Ottawa Public Health's Peer Overdose Prevention Program. Together, approximately 1,000 kits have been distributed in Ottawa in 2016.

New data from Ontario's chief coroner show fentanyl was the number one cause of opioid-related deaths in Ontario in 2015 for the second straight year. Over the past year, illicit fentanyl and fentanyl-related products (illegally produced and often highly toxic) have emerged as an acute public health concern.

The work of the ODPRTF aligns with recent Federal and Provincial strategies to address substance misuse. Federally, the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse developed the First Do No Harm: Responding to Canada's Prescription Drug Crisis strategy, which includes five streams of action: Prevention, Education, Treatment, Monitoring and Surveillance, and Enforcement. The work of the ODPRTF aligns specifically with the following recommendations which aim to:

- Prevent prescription drug-related harms to individuals, families and communities;
- Educate and empower the public and promote healthy and safe communities;
- Promote appropriate prescribing and dispensing practices among healthcare practitioners;
- Increase timely, equitable access to a range of effective treatment options throughout the continuum of pain and addictions treatment; and

- Identify effective, evidence-informed practices and policies and build upon them.

In December 2016, Federal Health Minister Philpott announced a new Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy to replace the existing National Anti-Drug Strategy. This evidence-based approach to drug policy uses a public health approach when considering and addressing drug issues and restores harm reduction as a core pillar of the policy, alongside prevention, treatment, and enforcement.

Provincially, in October 2016 the MOHLTC launched a strategy to Prevent Opioid Addiction and Overdose, which, aims to:

- Enhance overdose surveillance and monitoring;
- Improve treatment of pain and modernize opioid practices for prescribers; and
- Enhance addictions support and harm reduction, including the expansion of naloxone.

The ODPRTF last met on January 19th, 2017. In order to ensure that Ottawa is well prepared to respond to drug overdoses, the ODPRTF agreed to:

- Focus efforts on accelerating the development of an interagency Opioid Cluster Response protocol, which will enable an interagency response and communication in the event of a cluster of overdoses;
- Enhance a local monitoring overdose surveillance plan with partners, which includes both real-time data collection, as well as regular monitoring; and
- Seek to expand membership of the ODPRTF to include Ottawa Fire Services, City of Ottawa's Office of Emergency Management, Canadian Centre on Substance Misuse, Montfort Renaissance and/or Withdrawal Management Centre, the Queensway Carleton Hospital, CHEO and the Ottawa Detention Centre.

NEXT STEPS

OPH will continue to work on surveillance, prevention and response to reduce harms due to opioids, including working with partners on the task force. The Board will be apprised of pertinent developments.

'Original signed by'

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