



# Addressing the Opioid Overdose Emergency in Ontario

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Municipal Recommendations for a Provincial Response

September 4, 2019

## Context:

The opioid overdose emergency is affecting communities right across Ontario. Overdoses and deaths are on the rise. It is not an issue confined to a few areas. The emergency is playing out in urban, rural, northern, and remote settings. Addiction to both prescription and illegal opioids is taking a toll on individuals, families, and entire communities. The prevalence of addiction and the incidence of injuries and deaths associated with opioid use disorder have increased in recent years. Addictions are often concurrent with mental health disorders.

Municipal governments, District Social Service Administration Boards and local Public Health agencies are contributing to solutions on the ground. However, municipal services, including public health, social services, police, fire and paramedics across Ontario, are already under great pressures to keep up and combat rising opioid-related harms and death rates. Local responses to the opioid overdose emergency need provincial leadership and support. The time for action to address this health emergency is now.

With the provincial government developing a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, there is opportunity to direct specific attention to the opioid overdose emergency through an overall drug strategy. With this in mind, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is providing a broad range of recommendations to inform a provincial response. These recommendations have been adopted by AMO's Board of Directors based on the advice of AMO's Health Task Force, aided by an Expert Municipal Working Group on Opioids. The membership of these groups is outlined in Appendix A and B. They included representatives from various municipal sectors involved in the local response including public health, paramedics, police, and social services.

The recommendations are as follows:

### **Initial Foundational Steps (recommended action for 2019):**

1. That the Province publicly affirms the seriousness of the opioid overdose emergency and commit to take all necessary measures to save lives and prevent harm, including the provision of long-term funding for existing programs as well as new funding streams, where necessary.
2. That the Province undertakes an 'all of government' effort to develop a comprehensive provincial drug strategy that addresses the opioid overdose emergency, based on a public health approach that addresses the social determinants of health, and that takes a non-discriminatory approach to overdose prevention and harm reduction. This strategy should cascade down to guide local drug strategy development and implementation with accompanying resources so that municipalities in Ontario have comprehensive, multi-faceted, funded drug strategies in place led by dedicated local coordinators. Further, progress toward implementation should be measured with performance indicators and be evaluated for outcomes achieved.
3. That the Ministry of Health appoint a dedicated coordinator focused solely on the provincial response to the emergency, and tasked with building partnerships between various sectors and act as a liaison between the government and the sectors.

4. That the provincial coordinator establishes formal means to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including municipal governments, public health units, and people with lived experience in order to hear advice and feedback on new and ongoing initiatives.

#### **Further Actions Based on Consultation with Stakeholders:**

5. That the Province examines, and its ministries provide, a coordinated 'all of government' response with adequate funding to address the root causes of addiction, including housing-related factors, poverty, unemployment, mental illness, and trauma.
6. That the provincial coordinator undertakes a study scoping out the problem of drug misuse, documenting local responses, and identifying leading practices.
7. That the provincial coordinator plays a role to help municipal governments share information with each other on successful elements of drug strategies and leading practices.
8. That the provincial coordinator facilitates better utilization of real-time data reporting from local surveillance systems to inform and guide provincial and local responses including how to reach at-risk populations.
9. That the provincial coordinator develops sub-strategies based on the data for specific populations over represented among drug users, with adequate consultation with these populations. Any sub-strategy seeking to support Indigenous peoples should be developed in consultation with Indigenous communities, Indigenous service providers with relevant local service providers including municipal governments, local Public Health agencies and District Social Service Administration Boards.
10. That the Ministry of Health provides more funding to support, enhance and expand evidence-based consumption, treatment and rehabilitation services, addiction prevention and education, and harm reduction measures in all areas of Ontario.
11. That the Ministry of Health targets funding for addiction and mental health services that would assist in treating people with mental illness to reduce and/or eliminate self-medication and would provide services to help people overcome their addiction.
12. That the Ministry of the Solicitor General provides enhanced funding to enforce laws surrounding illicit drug supply, production, and distribution.
13. That the Province enhances funding for diversion programs, mobile crisis intervention teams, and further promote harm reduction approaches among police services.
14. That the Ministry of Health ensures there is awareness of the opioid emergency throughout the health care transformation process and ensure necessary services are available through the Ontario Health Teams, including primary care, to treat addiction.
15. That the Ministry of Health examines community paramedicine as a viable option to provide treatment and referral services.
16. That the Ministry of Health should continue work with the medical community on appropriate pain management and prescribing of opioids.

17. That the Ministry of Health funds a public education campaign, including on social media, to complement the efforts of individual communities.
18. That the provincial coordinator work with the Ministry of Education to add a health-promoting youth-resiliency program to the school curriculum that includes coping skills to get through obstacles in life, e.g. social competence, conflict resolution, healthy relationships, and informed decision-making.
19. That the Ministry of Health fully funds (100%) Naloxone for all municipal first responders (paramedics, police, and fire services) and provide training in its use.
20. That the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services work together with municipal human service system managers to better link social service and health supports including to help people overcome addiction and address mental health.
21. That the Ministry of Health works toward a goal of establishing and maintaining 30,000 supportive housing units in the province.
22. That the Province advocates to the federal government for appropriate and supportive measures that will support effective provincial and local responses.

## Appendix A – AMO Health Task Force Membership

Graydon Smith, Chair, Mayor, Town of Bracebridge

Bernie MacLellan, Councillor, County of Huron, and Mayor, Municipality of Huron East

Dan McCormick, CAO, Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board

Donald Sanderson, CEO, West Parry Sound Health Centre

Doug Lawrance, Mayor, Municipality of Sioux Lookout

Gary Carr, Regional Chair, Region of Halton

Jane Sinclair, General Manager, Health and Emergency Services, County of Simcoe

Jesse Helmer, Councillor Ward 4, City of London

Jim Pine, Chief Administrative Officer, County of Hastings

Joanne Vanderheyden, Mayor, Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc

Katherine Chislett, Commissioner of Community & Health Services, Regional Municipality of York

Dr. Liana Nolan, Medical Officer of Health/Commissioner, Public Health, Region of Waterloo

Lisa Levin, Executive Director, AdvantAge Ontario

Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies

Mabel Watt, Manager, Policy Integration, Region of Halton

Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services, Regional Municipality of Peel

Neal Roberts, Chief of Middlesex-London Emergency Medical Services Authority, and President,  
Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs

Norman Gale, City Manager, City of Thunder Bay

Penny Lynn Lucas, Councillor, Township of Ignace

Peter Dundas, Chief Paramedic Services, Regional Municipality of Peel, and Ontario Association of  
Paramedic Chiefs Board Member (Vice-President)

Dr. Robert Kyle, Commissioner and Medical Officer of Health, Regional Municipality of Durham

Monika Turner, Director of Policy, Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Michael Jacek, Senior Advisor, Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Leslie Muñoz, Policy Advisor, Association of Municipalities of Ontario

## Appendix B – Municipal Opioids Expert Working Group Membership

Michael Jacek, Chair, Senior Advisor, Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services, Region of Niagara

Brian Gibson, Deputy Chief, Peel Region Paramedic Services, Region of Peel and Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs

Brian Marks, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Cochrane Social Services Administration Board

Dawn McAlpine, General Manager, Community & Corporate Services, City of Barrie

Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, Medical Officer of Health, Hamilton Public Health

Esther Moghadam, Chief Nursing Officer/Director for Health Promotion, Ottawa Public Health

Greg Sage, Chief, Halton Region Paramedic Services, Region of Halton and Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs

Dr. Janet DeMille, Medical Officer of Health, Thunder Bay District Health Unit

Leslie Muñoz, Policy Advisor, Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Dr. Lianne Catton, Medical Officer of Health, Porcupine Health Unit

Dr. Lisa Simon, Associate Medical Officer of Health, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA)

Mark Baxter, Director, Police Association of Ontario

Melissa Hutchinson, Program Manager, Regional Municipality of Durham

Dr. Rita Shahin, Associate Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health, City of Toronto

Dr. Rosana Salvaterra, Medical Officer of Health, Peterborough Public Health

Tim Farquharson, Deputy Chief of Police, Peterborough Police Service and Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police