

WINDSOR-ESSEX  
COMMUNITY  
**OPIOID &  
SUBSTANCE**  
STRATEGY

## **WECOSS Leadership Committee Meeting**

**Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup> from  
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

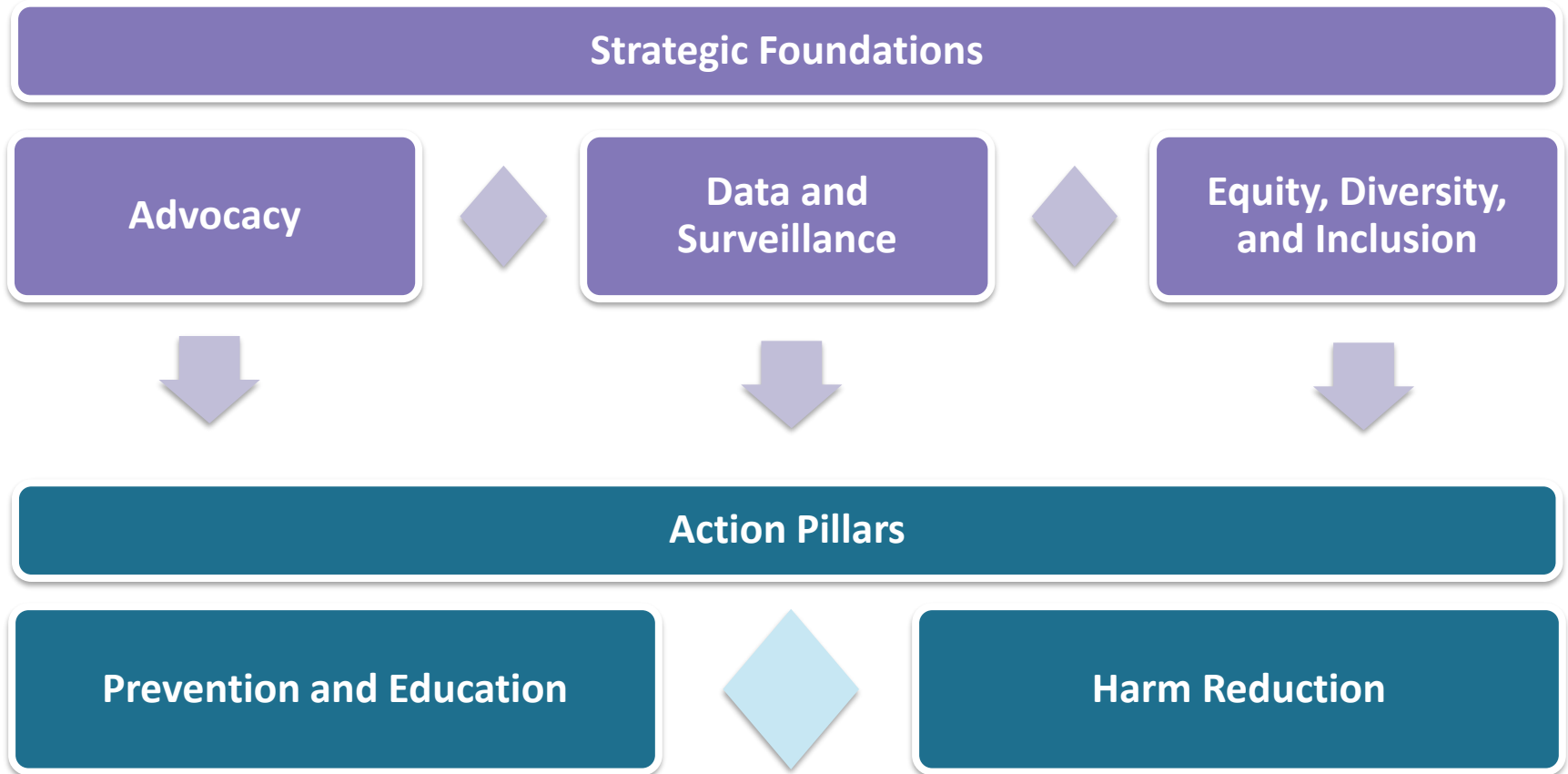
# **WECOSS Action Plan Proposed Framework and Structure (2026-2030)**

# WECOSS Action Plan Renewal:

## *At a Glance*

- ❖ In 2025, the WECOSS launched a project aimed at creating a **new, multi-year action plan** for the strategy.
- ❖ The goals of the action plan renewal were to:
  - Adapt the strategy and its plans to reflect **current community capacities, needs, and service gaps**.
  - Define the **unique roles and functions** that the WECOSS can fulfill within the larger system going forward.
- ❖ Over the months of September to December, community **partners were consulted and relevant data was collected** to guide the development of the new action plan.
- ❖ This information was used to prepare a **proposed framework and structure** for an action plan spanning over the period of 2026-2030.

# Strategic Approach (2026-2030)



# Strategic Foundations



## Advocacy

- Advocate for evidence-based solutions and healthy public policies that prevent and reduce substance-related harms.
- Strengthen capacity and resources available to advance strategic priorities for the WECOSS.



## Data and Surveillance

- Enhance access to research and community-level data to guide interventions and support informed decision-making.
- Foster accountability by establishing systems to monitor progress, measure outcomes, and demonstrate impact of WECOSS initiatives.



## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

- Ensure that all programs are driven by the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Meaningfully engage priority populations in the design and implementation of programs.

# Action Pillars



## Prevention and Education

- Prevent and delay the onset of substance use by addressing the social determinants of health that impact use.
- Improve community understanding of substance use as a health issue.



## Harm Reduction

- Reduce the health, social, and economic harms associated with substance use.
- Protect and promote the dignity, self-determination, and rights of people who use substances.

# Guiding Recommendations

## *Prevention and Education*



### WECOSS' Role

- Local implementation of community-wide and evidence informed upstream interventions
- Public education campaigns on substance use health issues
- Expanding access to resources for community partners and the public



### WECHU's Role *(In Collaboration with Partners)*

- Upstream mental health promotion programming
- Fostering positive parenting and supportive family systems
- Promoting healthy school environments



### CSWB's Role

- Extra-curricular opportunities that promote resilience and healthy coping (e.g., arts, recreation, sport)
- Creating and preserving community spaces that promote a sense of belonging

# Guiding Recommendations

## *Harm Reduction*



### WECOSS' Role

- Standardize and coordinate harm reduction service pathways
- Support community partners in adopting harm reduction and anti-stigma policies
- Best practice education on naloxone use as a safe and standard first aid measure
- Stigma reduction towards substance use and harm reduction through PWLLE engagement

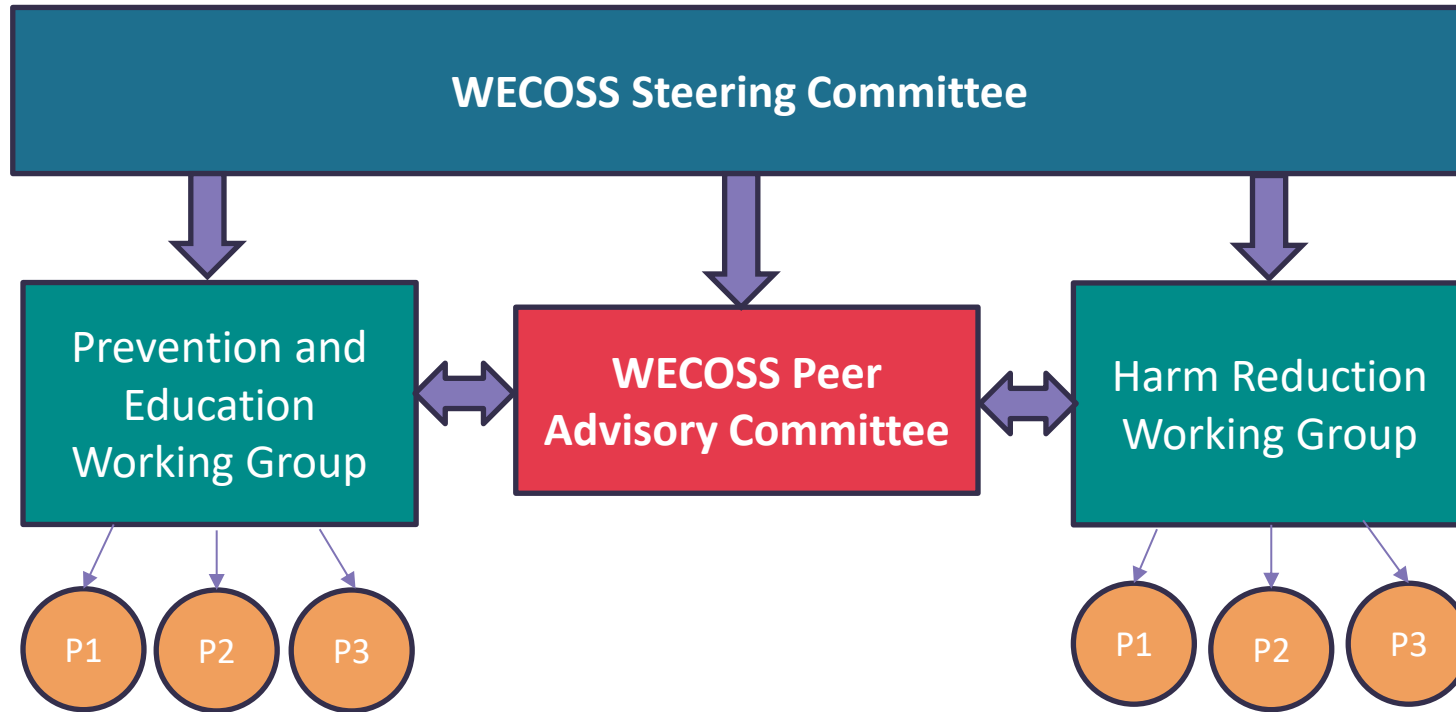


### WECHU's Role

- Expand access to harm reduction supplies and services (e.g., ONP, NSP, and DTS expansion)
- Establish a dedicated drug checking service (in collaboration with MOST)

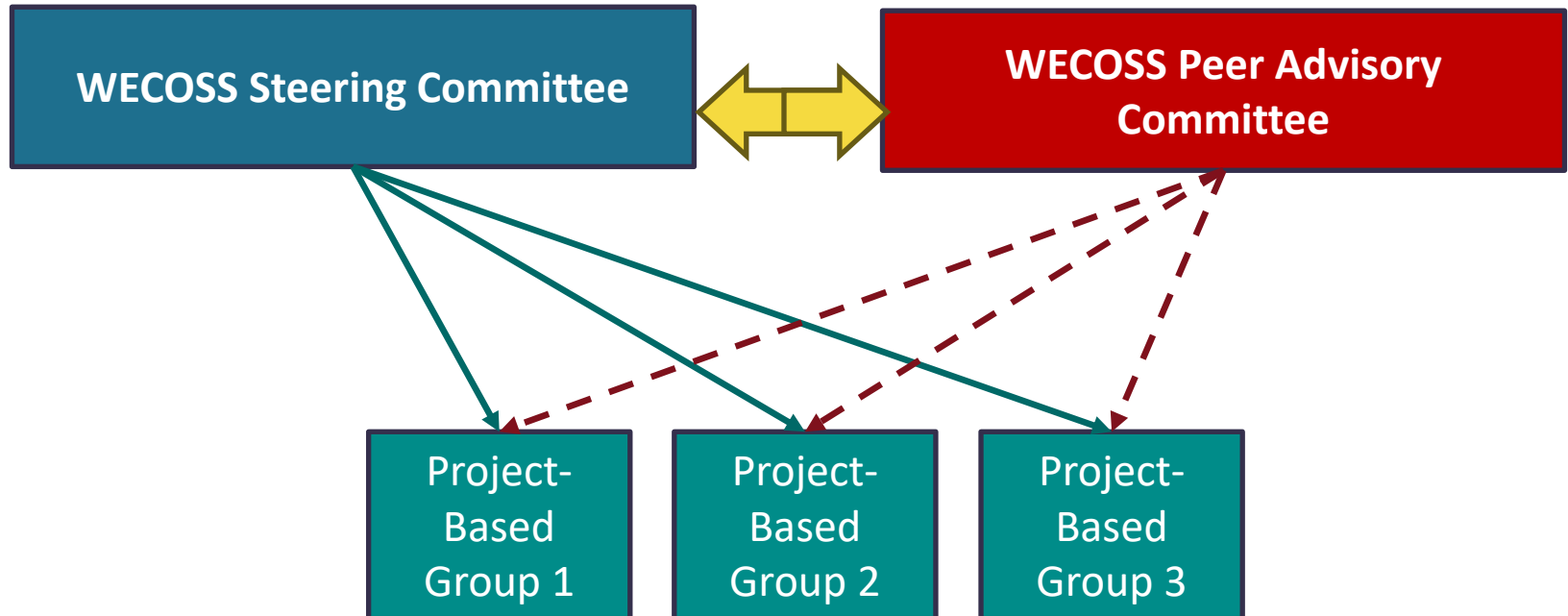
# Proposed Structure (2026-2030)

*Option 1  
(For Member Vote)*



# Proposed Structure (2026-2030)

*Option 2  
(For Member Vote)*



# Teams Poll: Vote on New Structure

# Vision

## Potential Vision Statements for the WECOSS: (For Member Vote)

### Option 1 (Current Vision)

- A community that works together to improve the health and well-being of all residents by preventing and reducing health and social harms related to substance use.

### Option 2

- A community where preventable drug-related harms are reduced, and everyone can live safely and well.

### Option 3

- A community where all people are supported, safe, and free from preventable substance-related harms.

### Option 4

- A community that supports all people to live well and reduce preventable substance-related harms.

# Teams Poll: Vote on Vision

# Mission

## Potential Mission Statements for the WECOSS: *(For Member Vote)*

### Option 1 *(Current Mission)*

- To build effective community partnerships, sustain comprehensive community-level initiatives, and enhance the quality and range of programs or support services available to address substance use issues.

### Option 2

- To strengthen community partnerships and deliver coordinated, evidence-informed initiatives that prevent substance-related harms and support community well-being.

### Option 3

- To work together across diverse sectors to reduce substance-related harms and support people who use substances with dignity and respect.

### Option 4

- To lead a coordinated, equitable response to the substance use crisis that improves health and well-being for all residents.

# Teams Poll: Vote on Mission

# Values

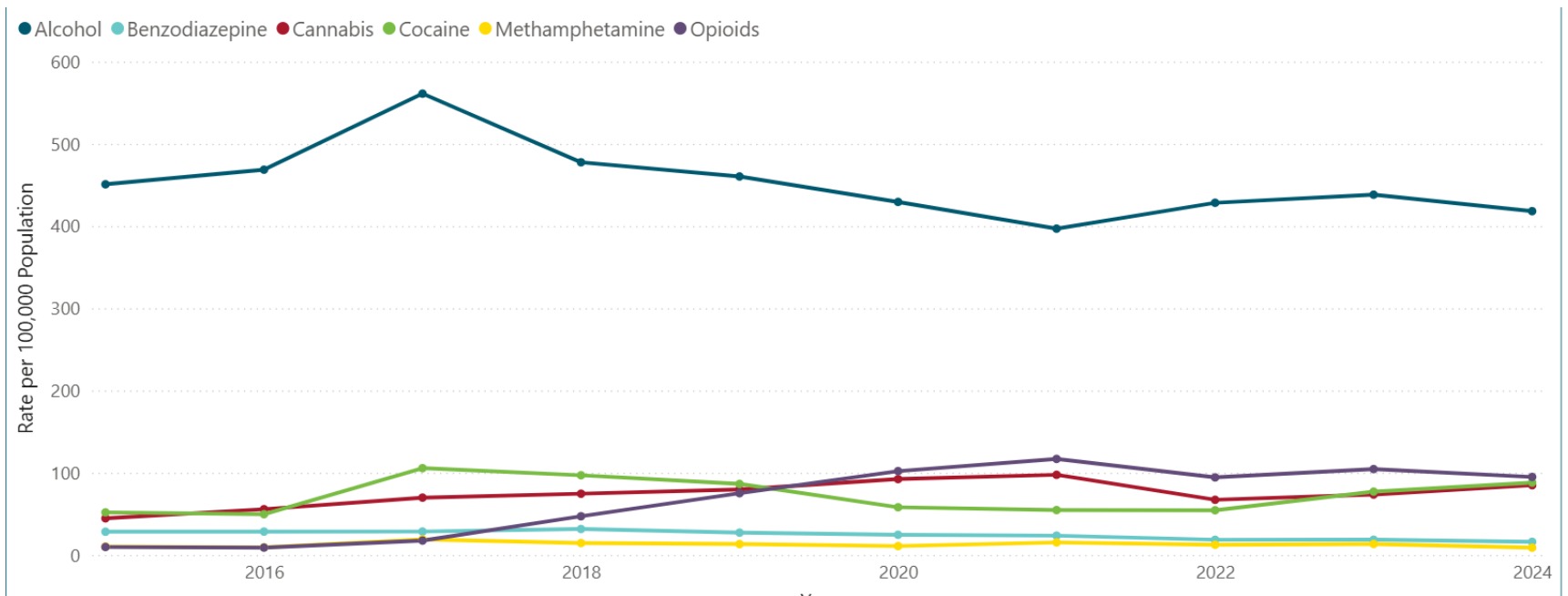
- ❖ **Collaboration:** Working together across sectors, organizations, and communities to create coordinated, effective solutions.
- ❖ **Coordination:** Aligning strategies, resources, and communication to strengthen a unified substance response to substance-related harms.
- ❖ **Compassion and dignity:** Treating every person with humanity, respect, and non-judgement, actively reducing stigma in all forms.
- ❖ **Evidence-informed decision making:** Using timely data, research, and lived experience to guide planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- ❖ **Accountability and transparency:** Setting clear expectations, measuring progress, communicating openly, and committing to continuous improvement.
- ❖ **Innovation:** Embracing creativity and new approaches to address complex substance-related challenges and improve health outcomes.

# Year 1 Action Plan Activities (2026)

- ❖ Finalize and formally launch the new action plan by revamping WECOSS.ca.
- ❖ Rebuild the WECOSS Terms of Reference to align with the new governance structure.
- ❖ Solidify membership for the new committees and establish roles and responsibilities of member agencies.
- ❖ Lay the groundwork for the strategy by developing systems and processes to implement the strategic foundations.
- ❖ Prioritize projects under the action pillars and start executing priority projects in alignment with new structure.

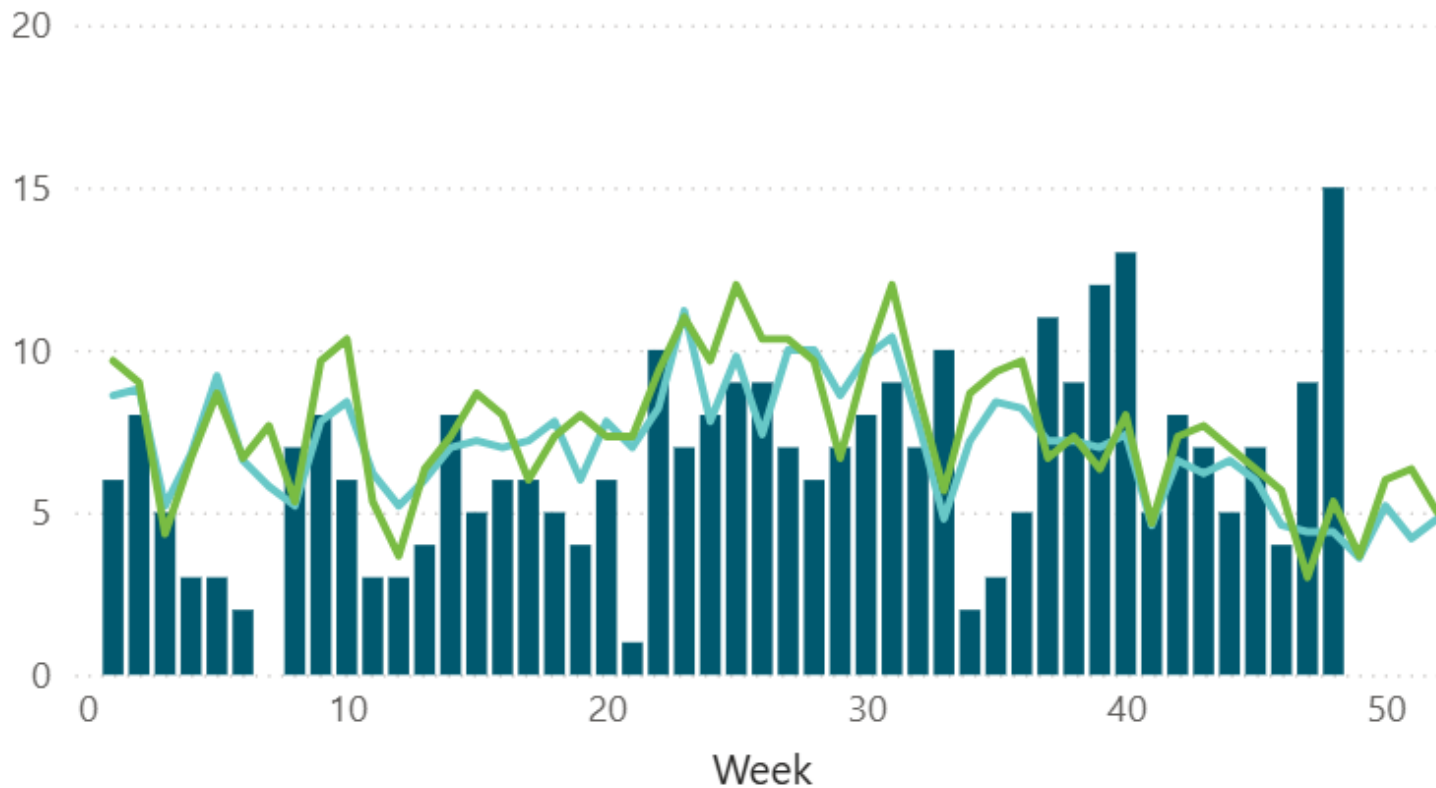
# Opioid and Substances Data Review

# Annual Rate of Emergency Department Visits by Substance

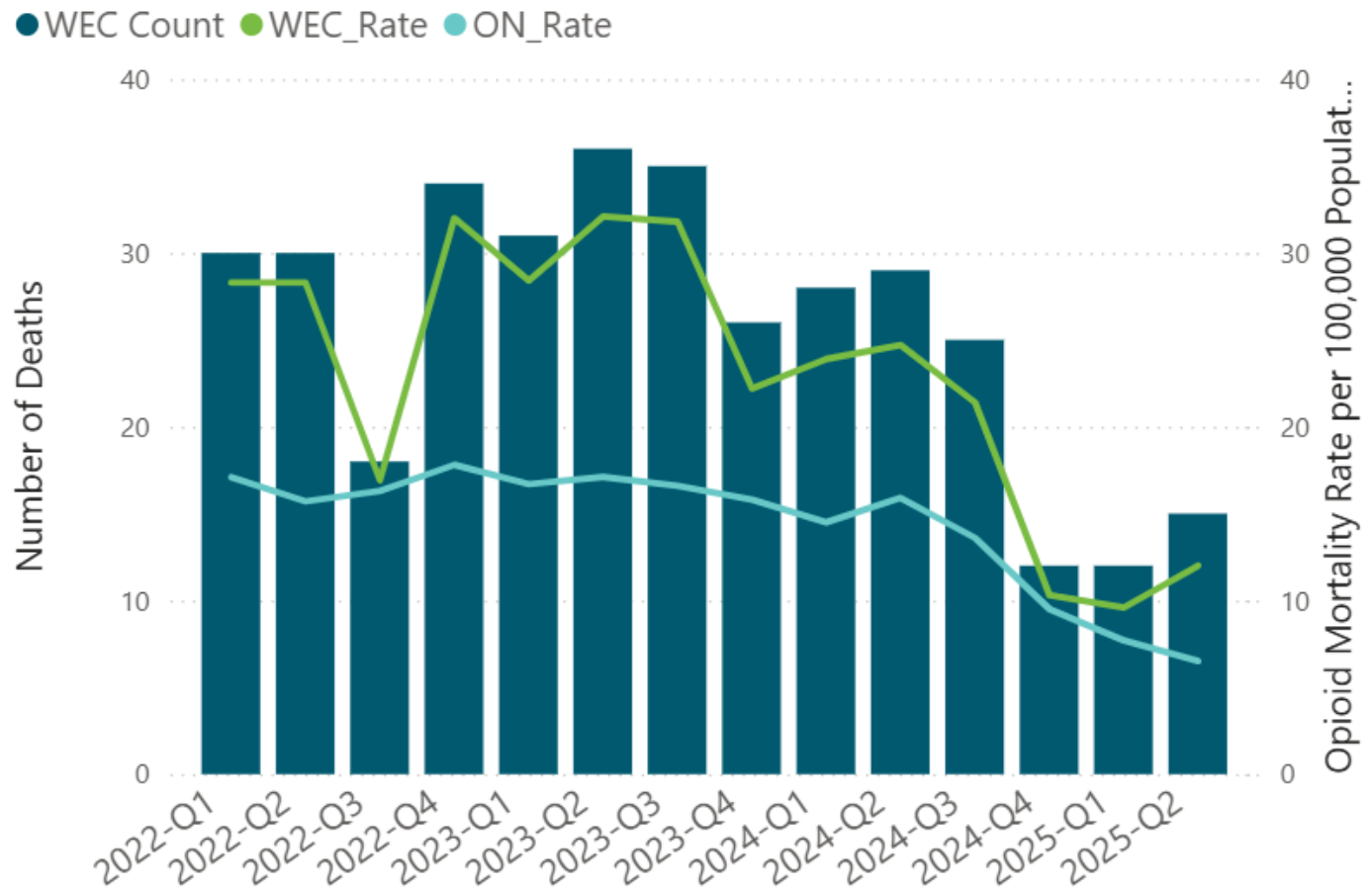


# Emergency Department Visits for Opioid Overdose in 2025 by Week

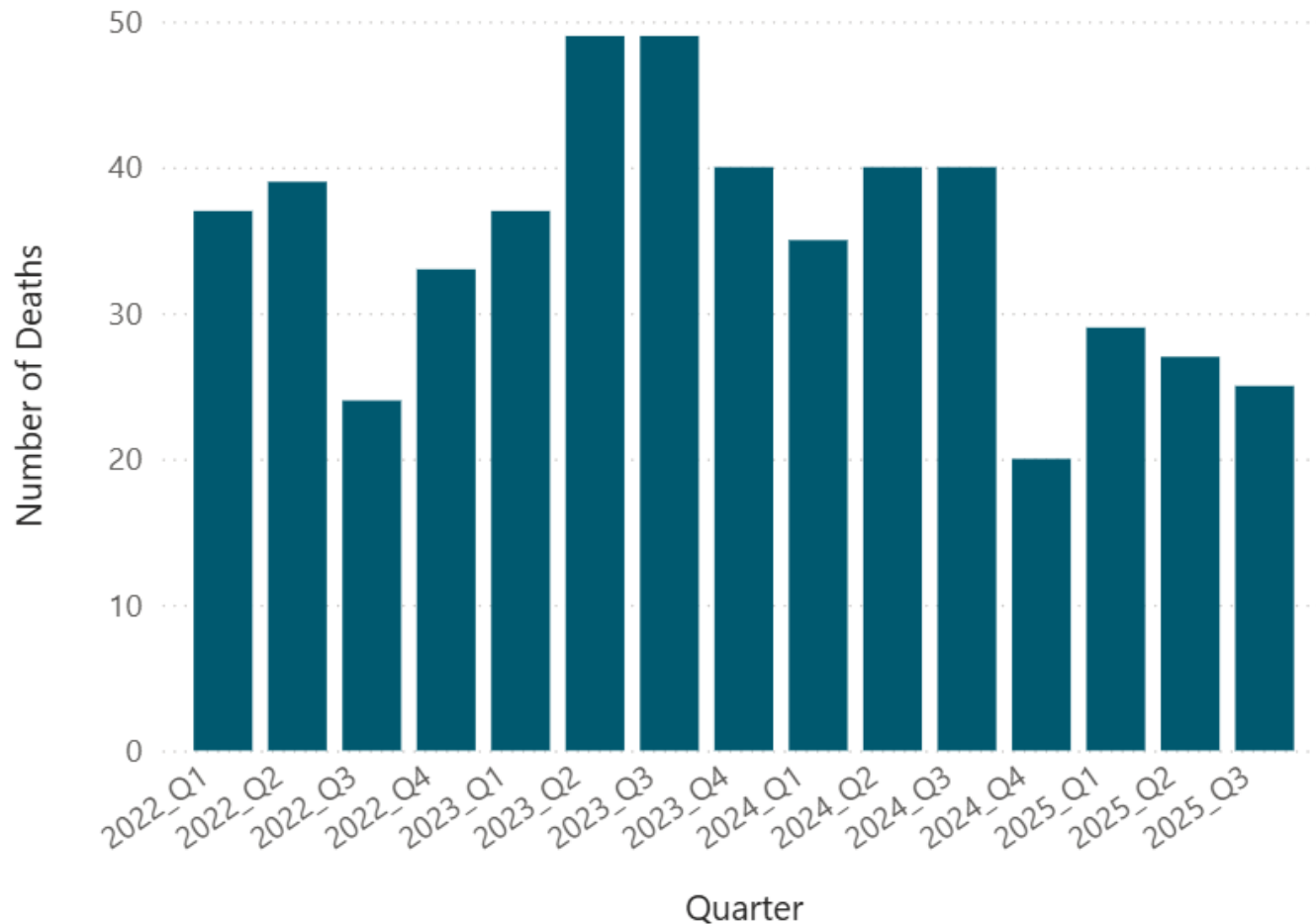
Hospital reported opioid ODs\_2025 ● 2020-2024 avg. ● 2022-2024 avg.



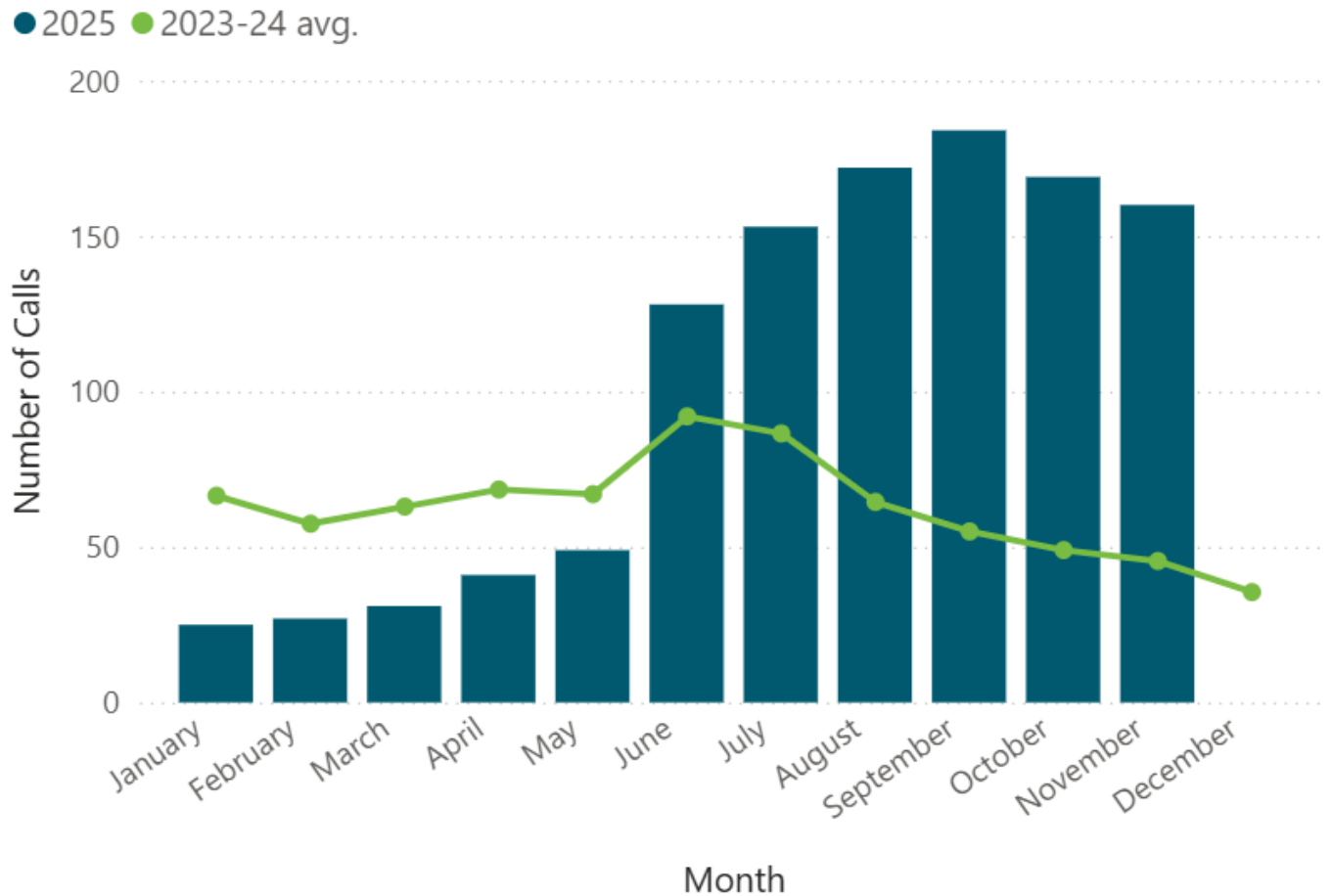
# Opioid Related Deaths by Quarter



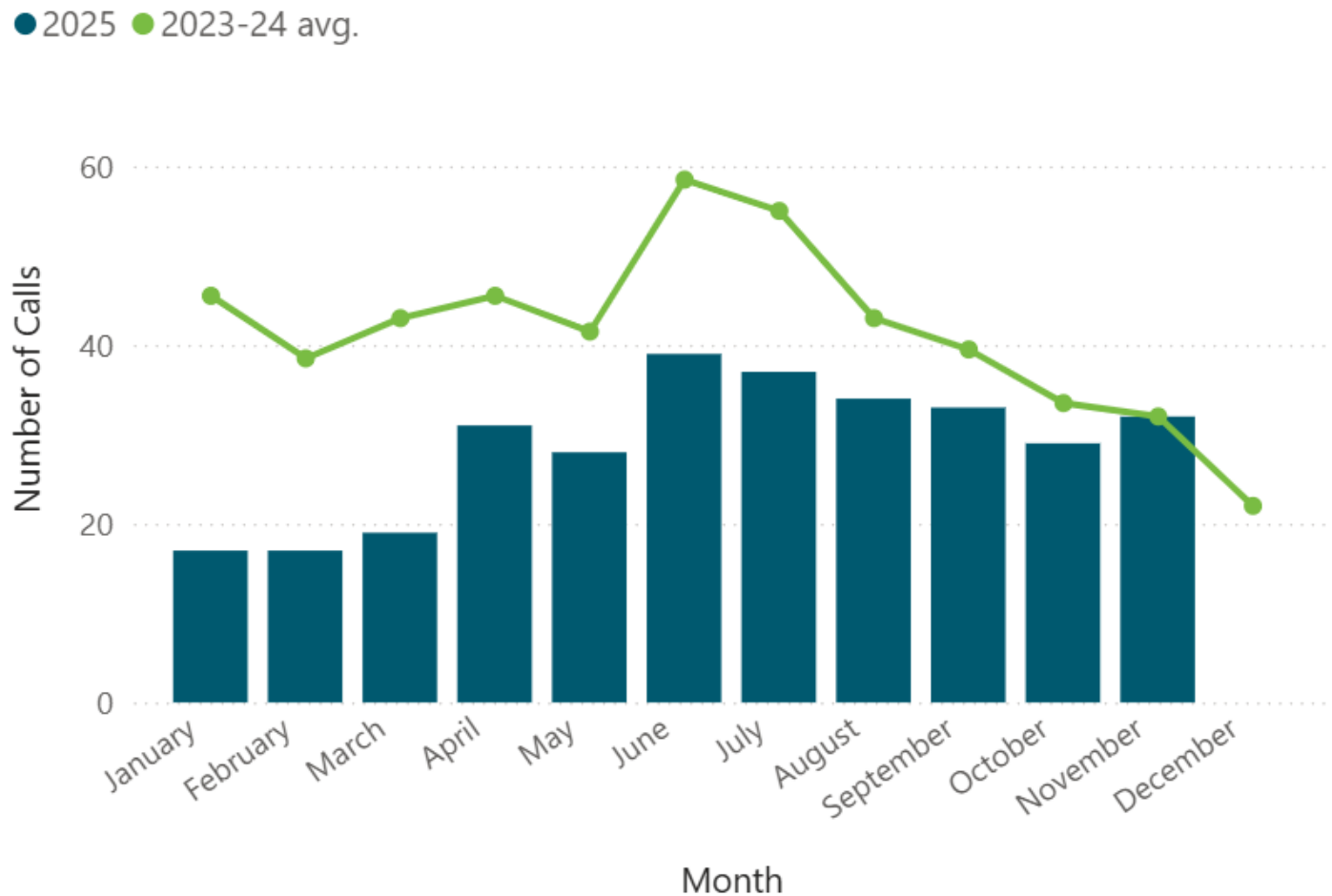
# Suspected Drug Related Deaths by Quarter



# EMS Calls for Suspected Drug Misuse by Month



# EMS Calls for Suspected Opioid Overdose by Month



# WECOSS Working Group Updates

# Harm Reduction (A. Adams)

## *2025 Project: Building Community For Harm Reduction*

### **Project Purpose:**

Implement policy solutions and community education interventions to dispel harmful ideologies, improve knowledge/attitudes, and reduce stigma towards harm reduction.

### **Key Activities and Outputs:**



Development of an anti-stigma policy template for organizations.



Anti-stigma workshops for organizations to support integration of the policy into practice.



Anti-stigma social media campaign to promote understanding of harm reduction.



# Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Template

## Status Updates:

- ❖ A Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Template was created for community organizations that work with or support people who use substances.
- ❖ The purpose of the policy template is to provide organizations with a set of standardized procedures and practices that can be used to create inclusive, person-centered, and stigma-free environments.
- ❖ The template is universal in that it can be applied and adapted to a wide range of community service settings, including treatment centres, healthcare facilities, emergency response services, justice-oriented organizations, and others.
- ❖ It is shaped by the guiding principles of harm reduction, trauma and violence-informed practice, equity and inclusion, and collaboration with PWLLE.

### Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Template

#### Preamble

Substance-related mortality, emergency department visits, and hospitalizations have been on the rise in Windsor-Essex County. These outcomes are often linked to substance use disorder and addressing them requires confronting the stigma surrounding this condition. Research shows that stigma is rooted in the misconception that substance use disorder is a personal choice or moral failing (McGinty, E. E., & Barry, C. L. (2020)). Hence, there is a need to shift public perceptions to promote empathy and understanding, ultimately leading to better health outcomes for people who use substances.

Stigma creates barriers at individual, system, and societal levels—preventing people from seeking help, reducing the quality of care they receive, and fueling punitive responses instead of public health solutions. As stigma persists across communities and professional settings, it is critical to promote respect, dignity, and equity. Fostering inclusive, judgment-free environments for people who use substances and/or harm reduction practices can be achieved through education, trauma-informed care, and the use of non-stigmatizing language.

#### Purpose & Scope

The purpose is to guide [Service Agency/Organization Name] in fostering an environment where people with lived or living experience (PWLLE) of substance use and/or harm reduction are not burdened by stigma that limits access to care or opportunities for upward social mobility, ultimately supporting improvements in their quality of life. [Service Agency/Organization Name] is committed to fostering inclusive, non-judgmental environments for individuals with lived or living experience with substance use and/or harm reduction. Language plays a critical role in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and the quality of care provided. As such, all staff and representatives are expected to avoid terminology that is stigmatizing, inappropriate, or that reinforces negative stereotypes.

Stigmatizing language can contribute to harmful beliefs, discrimination, and barriers to accessing support and services—both within the organization and in the broader community. This policy promotes the consistent use of respectful, person-first language that affirms dignity and supports recovery-oriented care.

Approved terms include, but are not limited to:

- People who use substances
- People with a substance use disorder
- People living with a substance use disorder
- People who use drugs
- People in recovery

These terms can be used in both singular and plural contexts—for example, individual(s), client(s), patient(s), and people who use substances. For a comprehensive list of stigmatizing and non-stigmatizing, substance use–related terms, please refer to [Appendix B](#). For guidance on how these concepts can be implemented in conversation, see [Appendix C](#).

# Addressing Stigma E-learning Modules

## Status Updates:

- ❖ Two e-learning modules have been developed to support the integration of the policy template into community service environments.
- ❖ Addressing Stigma (Module 1) – The first module is targeted to all staff at community organizations and introduces stigma concepts, use of non-stigmatizing language, and staff roles in fostering stigma-free service environments.
- ❖ Addressing Stigma (Module 2) – The second module is targeted to policy leads at community organizations (e.g., leaders/managers, human resource representatives) and provides an overview of guiding strategies to support implementation of the policy.



*The E-learning modules can be accessed directly at <https://learn.wechu.org> and [www.wecoss.ca](http://www.wecoss.ca).*

# Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Workshop

## Status Updates:

- ❖ A Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Workshop took place on Wednesday, November 26<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. at the Caboto Club.
- ❖ The workshop was co-facilitated by the WECHU's Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction Department and the Welcome Centre Shelter for Women and Families.
- ❖ The session was targeted to policy leads at community organizations and included substance use stigma education, an overview of the Reducing Substance Use Stigma Policy Template, and guidance on policy implementation.
- ❖ 30 participants from a wide variety of sectors attended the workshop.
- ❖ 94% of evaluation respondents indicated that they plan on implementing or recommending the implementation of the policy template at their service setting.

# Anti-Stigma Social Media Campaign

## Status Updates:

- ❖ To support public understanding and supportive attitudes towards these topics, a public-facing educational campaign has been launched on the WECHU's social media channels with anti-stigma messaging.
- ❖ The content was developed in partnership with the WECHU's Substance Use Peer Advisory Committee to ensure that the perspectives of those with lived/living experience were captured.
- ❖ The campaign consists of eight distinct messages that promote empathy, compassion, and respect for those who use substances.
- ❖ The messages are being released over the period of October 1<sup>st</sup> to December 16<sup>th</sup> on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X.

# Prevention and Education (J. Bradt/K. Willis)

## 2025 Project: Youth and Family Engagement and Outreach for Substance Use Prevention

### Project Purpose:

To educate and build community capacity for substance use prevention among youth and families.

### Key Activities and Outputs:



Collaborate with community partners to implement the *Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM)* locally.



Host in-person and virtual education sessions on substance use prevention for parents, caregivers, and families.



Collaborate with school boards to provide resources and lesson plans to support schools.



Participate as guest speakers at community events.



# Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM)

- ❖ In early 2025, CMHA-WECB, in partnership with multiple community partners, submitted a grant application for Health Canada's Youth Mental Health Fund to support implementation of IPM locally.
- ❖ This grant was not received.
- ❖ Community partners are exploring other options to build community capacity for IPM implementation.
- ❖ In 2026, the WECHU plans to identify and collate youth substance use data sources across Windsor-Essex County to inform future prevention strategies, such as IPM (which is a data-driven community model).
- ❖ This will involve collaboration with school boards and other community partners serving youth to enhance data collection and sharing across organizations.

# Substance Use Prevention Workshops

In 2025, seven (7) workshops were delivered on youth substance use prevention topics.

Date	Event/Workshop Title	Description
April 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Empowering Voices – Youth Leading Change (County Youth Symposium)	Workshop and resources delivered by WECHU on youth vaping.
May 20 <sup>th</sup>	Clear the Air – Vaping Information for Parents of Youth (French Session)	Webinar organized by WECHU, in collaboration with CSC Providence.
May 21 <sup>st</sup>	Clear the Air – Vaping Information for Parents of Youth (English Session)	Webinar organized by WECHU, in collaboration with CSC Providence.
July 17 <sup>th</sup>	Family and Youth Substance Use Prevention Workshop	Workshop delivered by WECHU to newcomer audience, in collaboration with the Unemployed Help Centre.
August 14 <sup>th</sup>	Substance Use and Harm Reduction Workshop	Workshop organized by WECHU with Student Resident Advisors at St. Clair College.
August 21 <sup>st</sup>	Nicotine, Vaping, and Digital Dependency Workshop	Co-led workshop by WECHU and HDGH with parents and families from a local public school.
September 16 <sup>th</sup>	Helping with Substance Use in Windsor-Essex County	Workshop organized by WECHU with parents of youth at the Welcome Centre Shelter for Women and Families.

**88.2% (75/85) of evaluation respondents reported improved understanding of the topics presented.**

# Community Events for Substance Use Prevention

In 2025, eleven (11) community events were attended to distribute youth substance use prevention resources and information:

Empowering Voices –  
Youth Leading Change  
(City Youth Symposium)  
(February 26<sup>th</sup>)

Sandwich Teen Action  
Group Health Fair  
(March 13<sup>th</sup>)

Lassaline Reginald Health  
Fair  
(April 10<sup>th</sup>)

Viamonde Health Fair  
(May 8<sup>th</sup>)

Amherstburg Health Fair  
(June 19<sup>th</sup>)

CHC Youth Wellness  
Event at Crowley Park  
(July 3<sup>rd</sup>)

CHC Youth Wellness  
Event at Pykes Park  
(July 8<sup>th</sup>)

Windsor-Essex Pride Fest  
(August 10<sup>th</sup>)

Neighbourhood  
Celebration School  
Readiness Event in  
Windsor (August 15<sup>th</sup>)

Neighbourhood  
Celebration School  
Readiness Event in  
Leamington (August 29<sup>th</sup>)

Glengarry Friendsgiving  
Community Health Fair  
(October 9<sup>th</sup>)

100% (64/64) of evaluation respondents reported improved awareness of the topics presented.

# School Supports for Tobacco, Vaping, and Nicotine Use

- ❖ The WECHU is creating updated policy recommendations for schools and school boards on addressing tobacco, vaping, and nicotine use at school, in alignment with PPM 128 requirements.
- ❖ Policy recommendations include resources to support prevention/education, cessation, and progressive enforcement approaches with students and at school.
- ❖ To support adoption of the policy recommendations, an e-learning module is also being developed that can be taken by students caught smoking/vaping at school as an alternative to punitive measures (a progressive enforcement approach).
- ❖ The policy recommendations and e-learning module will be finalized and released to the school boards in the coming months.

# Treatment and Recovery (K. Leckonby)

## 2025 Project: Expanding Access to Opioid Agonist Therapy

### Project Purpose:

Support improved access to opioid agonist therapy (OAT) for individuals living with opioid use disorder in the community.

### Key Activities and Outputs:



Deliver training sessions for health and social service providers on facilitating conversations and supporting connections to OAT.



Improve navigability of OAT on WEC Connect.



Develop provider and client resources to support understanding of OAT treatment options.



# Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) Webinar

- ❖ Lunch and learn webinar was hosted for frontline service providers on Friday, November 28<sup>th</sup> on “*Opening Doors to Recovery – Frontline Approaches to Support Access to OAT*”.
- ❖ Webinar was facilitated by Jen Burton, Program Manager and Nurse Practitioner at the VON Chronic Pain Program. A peer speaker was also present to share their personal experiences with OAT.
- ❖ Participants were provided with education on OAT treatments, supporting conversations with clients/patients about OAT, and facilitating connections to OAT treatment options in the community.
- ❖ In total, there were 50 individuals in attendance.
- ❖ 94.1% (16/17) of evaluation respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they intend to apply the concepts discussed during the webinar in their work with clients/patients.
- ❖ The webinar recording is available at <https://wecoss.ca/resource/for-service-providers>.

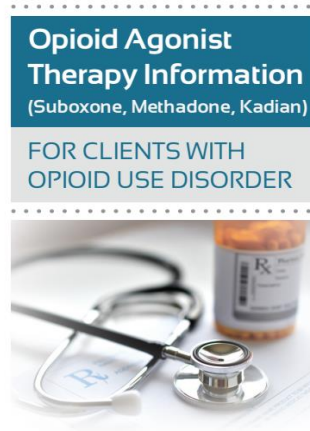
# Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) Resources

New OAT Resources (WECOSS, 2025)

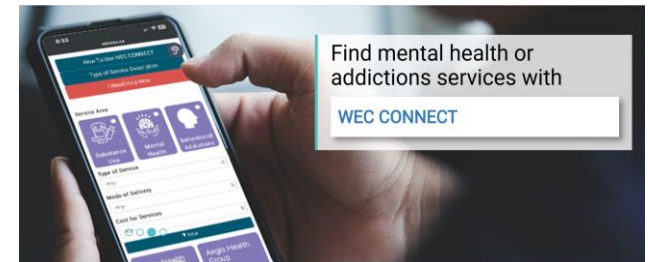
Available for download at <https://wecoss.ca/resource/for-service-providers>.



Service Provider Booklet



Client Brochure



OAT Service Listing on WEC Connect

# Enforcement and Justice (D. Connor)

## 2025 Project: Strengthening Community Safety and Well-Being

### Project Purpose:

Sustain and expand the neighbourhood safety planning process initiated by the Substance Supports in Neighbourhoods Accessed through Police Partnerships (SSNAPP) team.

### Key Activities and Outputs:



Attend community events to educate residents about the existing neighbourhood safety plans developed for the City of Windsor



Conduct community consultations to examine neighbourhood safety/needs in Leamington and Essex



Create neighbourhood safety plans for Leamington and Essex



# Strengthening Community Safety and Wellbeing

## Accomplishments to Date Since Last Update:

- Attended **3** community events from October 9<sup>th</sup> to November 13<sup>th</sup> to educate residents about existing neighbourhood safety plans:
  - **82** safety plans distributed.
  - **100%** indicated they felt more confident in supporting safety related to substance use after receiving a review of the plans.
- Facilitated a Trauma-Informed Care workshop for 28 first responders and service providers who serve communities in Essex County.
  - Positive feedback from participants, 100% indicated that the training adequately supported them in following through with trauma-informed practices and they feel confident applying the skills and knowledge gained from training.
- Addictions and Mental Health webinar scheduled for December 16<sup>th</sup> for first responders and service providers.

# Strengthening Community Safety and Wellbeing

Steps Completed	Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conducted four focus groups with key stakeholders who serve communities in Leamington and Essex.</li><li>• Launched a community survey in October.</li><li>• Leamington and Essex safety plan drafts have been created based on focus group and survey results.</li><li>• Hosted a Trauma-Informed Care workshop for first responders and service providers from Essex County.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finalize and distribute Leamington and Essex safety plans.</li><li>• Create an evaluation to measure the effectiveness of the safety plans.</li><li>• Continue to attend community events to educate residents about existing safety plans.</li><li>• Host five additional workshops for first responders and service providers related to substance use, mental health, and other identified topics.</li></ul>

# Strengthening Community Safety and Wellbeing

## Summary of Results and Safety Plan Content:

- **100** individuals filled out the safety plan community survey (most from Leamington).
- Four focus groups conducted with first responders and service providers in Leamington and Essex, total of **23** participants.
- Main safety concerns highlighted include mental health, substance use, homelessness, road safety, and harassment.
- Additional topics highlighted within focus groups include the lack of county-based resources (particularly withdrawal management) as well as barriers to transportation.
- Two new topics added to both Leamington and Essex safety plans – human trafficking and intimate partner violence.
- Safety plans are currently being reviewed by SSNAPP partners.

# The Substance Use Peer Advisory Committee (PAC) (J. Bradt)

## PAC Updates:

- ❖ The PAC launched Summer 2025.
- ❖ Three PAC meeting's have occurred since then.
- ❖ Three focus groups occurred to consult the PAC on the WECOSS' Strategic Planning, comprised of 15 members total.
- ❖ The PAC was also engaged to provide input on the Anti-Stigma Social Media Campaign; their feedback was then implemented into the campaign.
- ❖ The PAC has participated in trainings and a workshop to support their participation on the committee.

**The PAC will continue into 2026, with many more exciting projects and updates to come.**