

**WINDSOR-ESSEX COMMUNITY  
OPIOID AND SUBSTANCE  
STRATEGY:  
OFFICIAL POSITION STATEMENT  
ON SAFE SUPPLY (2022)**



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

# Windsor-Essex Community Opioid & Substance Strategy

## *Official Position Statement on Safe Supply*

As opioid-related morbidity and mortality trends continue to surge at unprecedented rates across Canada, the need for safe supply initiatives has become an immediate public health issue that requires urgent action. In 2019, there were a total of 3,698 apparent opioid toxicity deaths reported across the country, 93% of which were accidental, and a total of 1,558 opioid-related deaths were reported in Ontario.<sup>1</sup> Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, these rates have continued to accelerate rapidly. In 2020, a total of 6,638 apparent opioid toxicity deaths occurred in Canada, 96% of which were accidental, and the number of opioid-related mortalities reported in Ontario increased to 2,459 deaths.<sup>1</sup> Windsor-Essex County (WEC) has experienced trends similar to those at the national and provincial levels, extending beyond 2020 and into 2021 and 2022. These numbers represent people, families, friends, and loved ones that are greatly affected.

While several factors are contributing to the opioid and overdose crisis in our communities, exposure to an increasingly toxic and unregulated drug market is the primary driver of opioid-related mortalities in Canada. In 2020, eighty-three percent (83%) of accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths across Canada involved fentanyl, the majority of which was non-pharmaceutical (98%).<sup>1</sup> Fentanyl is a cheap, yet very potent and lethal, opioid that is often sold illegally and detected in other illicit substances, such as heroin or cocaine.<sup>2</sup> Because fentanyl is odourless and tasteless, people are often unaware that their drug supply has been contaminated with fentanyl, substantially increasing the risks for accidental opioid-related harms, poisonings, and deaths. Increasing access to a safe and regulated drug supply can help to prevent future deaths and to support people who use drugs in living safe and healthy lives.

Safe supply initiatives significantly improve health outcomes by transitioning people who use drugs from the toxic unregulated drug market to legally prescribed pharmaceutical-grade substances within a regulated healthcare context. By providing a safer supply, healthcare professionals can support people who use drugs in addressing a spectrum of health and social concerns and accessing services that support their chosen pathways to wellness. These health initiatives have demonstrated exceptionally high client retention rates and significant reductions in overdose fatalities,<sup>3,4</sup> while also improving connections between people who use drugs to healthcare, treatment, and social service providers.<sup>4</sup>

The *Windsor-Essex Community Opioid & Substance Strategy* (WECOSS) is a local, inter-disciplinary collaborative that supports the development and implementation of comprehensive community-level initiatives to address substance use issues in WEC. One of the key roles of the WECOSS is to work with multi-sectoral organizations and stakeholder groups to reduce the harms associated with substance use in the community. This includes advocating for enhanced and equitable access to a wide range of evidence-informed harm reduction initiatives for people who use drugs, including a safer supply.



As such, the WECOSS hereby supports the implementation and expansion of safe supply initiatives as a critical and urgently needed response for addressing the continued increases in opioid-related overdoses and deaths in our communities. We urge all levels of government, legislators, professional colleges, healthcare professionals, and other service providers to take collective action in reducing barriers for people who use drugs to access a safer supply. We also call upon all stakeholders and members of the public to join the WECOSS in advocating for safe supply initiatives to help save lives and to improve the health, safety, and well-being of people who use drugs.

*The Windsor-Essex Community Opioid & Substance Strategy  
Leadership Committee*

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<sup>1</sup> Health Canada. (2021-2022). Opioid and stimulant-related harms in Canada. Retrieved from: <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/>. Accessed October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Accessed and updated June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Addiction & Mental Health. (2021). Fentanyl. Retrieved from <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/street-fentanyl/>.

<sup>3</sup> CATIE. (2021). Safe supply: What is it and what is happening in Canada? Retrieved from <https://www.catie.ca/prevention-in-focus/safe-supply-what-is-it-and-what-is-happening-in-canada>.

<sup>4</sup> Health Canada. (2021). Safer supply. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/responding-canada-opioid-crisis/safer-supply.html>.

