

MYTHS AND FACTS: UNDERSTANDING HARM REDUCTION APPROACHES

Harm reduction is an evidence-based, compassionate approach to substance use that focuses on reducing negative health and social impacts. It recognizes that people use substances for many reasons, and that safer use is better than unsafe use. With an unpredictable drug supply, it is an approach that focuses on keeping people safe and supporting health, without requiring people abstain from substances.

Harm reduction recognizes that people use substances for many reasons, and each person's needs are unique. Harm reduction includes strategies like distributing sterile supplies, providing naloxone and overdose prevention education, and connecting people to supports and care. It is also a relationship-based approach built on dignity and connection, recognizing that everyone is deserving of support.

Our community is still impacted by the ongoing drug toxicity crisis and harm reduction is one of many critical tools—alongside prevention, treatment, and recovery supports—to keep people safe, build trust, and ensure that individuals can access care even when traditional health services may be out of reach.

There are also a number of myths and misconceptions related to harm reduction. Below are some facts about harm reduction:

Myth #1: Harm reduction encourages or increases substance use.

Fact: Research consistently shows that harm reduction services, such as supervised consumption sites, naloxone distribution, and supply distribution, do not increase drug use. Instead, these approaches reduce deaths, infections, and connect people with healthcare and treatment options.

Myth #2: Harm reduction only benefits people who use substances.

Fact: Harm reduction prevents disease transmission, decreases emergency service use, and helps connect people to housing, health care, and social supports, which can improve community safety and wellbeing.

Myth #3: Providing sterile substance use supplies is not a good use of taxpayer money.

Fact: Harm reduction is cost-effective. Every dollar spent saves multiple dollars in health care and emergency response costs. Preventing drug poisonings and infections like HIV and hepatitis C also reduces long-term public health expenses.

Myth #4: People who use substances don't want help.

Fact: People use substances for many reasons, and support looks different depending on the person. Often stigma, fear, and lack of accessible services can create barriers. Harm reduction builds trust and provides a low-barrier entry point to care, meeting people where they are and respecting their goals.

Harm reduction is about dignity, safety, and connection. It saves lives, connects people to supports, and strengthens our collective ability to respond to the drug toxicity crisis.

Sources:

- [Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction \(CCSA\)](#)
- [Health Canada](#)
- [Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

About the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy

The Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy is a coalition of cross-sectoral partner agencies and members of the lived and living experience community, who are working to implement a 4-pillar drug strategy in the municipalities of Wellington County and the City of Guelph. The pillars include prevention, community safety, harm reduction, and treatment & recovery.