

Substance Use & Addiction

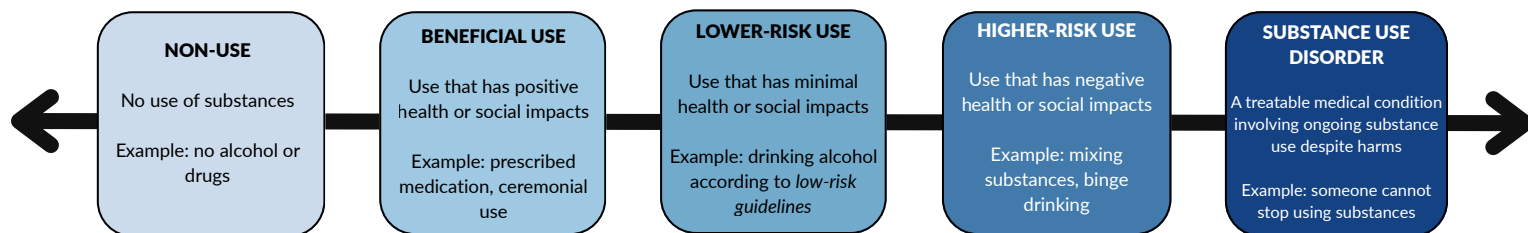
Municipal Election Fact Sheet for Guelph & Wellington County

Substance use is a complex health issue that affects individuals, families, and communities across Guelph and Wellington County. **Approximately 1 in 5 Canadians will meet the criteria for a substance use disorder in their lifetime.**¹ Municipalities across Ontario also continue to face the ongoing impacts of a toxic and unpredictable unregulated drug supply. Understanding substance use and local trends helps inform evidence-based responses that improve health, safety, and community wellbeing.

UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE

Substance use exists on a spectrum. People use substances in different ways and for different reasons, and their experiences can change over time. For some, substance use can be low-risk, while for others, it may lead to a substance use disorder requiring treatment, ongoing care, or other supports.

The spectrum below illustrates the different ways substance use can affect people, from lower-risk use to more significant challenges that may require additional support.



Adapted from Health Canada, 2024



Drug poisonings continue to impact our community and are linked to a toxic, unpredictable unregulated drug supply. People may not know what substances are present or how strong they are, increasing the risk of accidental poisoning. In Guelph-Wellington, this remains an important public health issue affecting individuals, families, and the wider community.

ACROSS CANADA:

56,000 Lives lost since 2016 (opioid-related)²

15 Substance-related deaths every day³



IN GUELPH-WELLINGTON:

497 Drug poisoning incidents since January 1, 2026. May 2026 recorded the highest monthly number of reported drug poisonings on record⁴

29 Fatalities since January 1, 2026⁴

65% of fatalities occurred in Wellington County; most in private residences⁵

TAKING ACTION TO ADDRESS SUBSTANCE USE

Community wellbeing depends on access to a continuum of services and supports. Addressing substance use requires a range of approaches, including prevention, harm reduction, treatment and community safety. Together, these approaches help prevent harms, connect people to care, and support the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.



Reduce Stigma

Like any other health issue, substance use requires evidence-informed care. Stigma can prevent people from seeking help or accessing the services they need. Addressing stigma, both in our communities and within systems of care, can help create an environment where people feel safer asking for support and accessing care earlier.

Support Local Organizations

Organizations in Guelph and Wellington provide a range of services and supports for people who use substances and their families. Supporting these organizations helps to minimize stigma, strengthen local capacity to prevent harms, connect people to care, and respond to emerging needs in the community.

Advocate For Sustained Investments

Stronger investment from all levels of government helps ensure communities have sustainable funding for prevention, treatment, and harm reduction services that support health, safety, and community wellbeing.⁶

ASK A CANDIDATE:



- ☒ Drug toxicity is a health issue that continues to claim lives in our community. What role do you believe municipal leaders should play in responding to this issue?
- ☒ How will you support increased access to substance use health services in our community?
- ☒ What actions would you take to reduce stigma and encourage community action related to substance use?

LEARN MORE:



Learn more about substance use, local initiatives, and community action in Guelph-Wellington at www.wgdrugstrategy.ca



Find local data and information about substance use trends and drug poisonings at www.wdgpublichealth.ca



Learn more about substance use and advocacy efforts across Ontario at <https://www.drugstrategy.ca/>



Learn more about poverty reduction initiatives in Guelph-Wellington at www.gwpoverity.ca



Read the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. The Opioid Crisis – A Municipal Perspective to learn more about the municipal role in responding to the substance use crisis.



Explore the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction's Playbook for Action: Practical Interventions Small Cities Can Use to Tackle Canada's Substance Use Crisis, which municipalities can use to strengthen local responses to substance use.



The Ontario Big City Mayors' **Solve the Crisis** campaign calls on the provincial government to take greater action and make additional investments to address mental health, addictions, homelessness and related community needs. **A collective response from mental health and addictions organizations across Ontario is available here:** Ontario mental health and addictions organizations respond to Ontario Big City Mayors' call for action on homelessness

1. Statistics Canada. Mental and substance use disorders in Canada.

2. Health Canada. Key findings: Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada. 2026.

3. Health Canada. National overdose deaths decline and federal response expands. 2026.

4. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. FAST Overdose Alert Platform: Wellington County Weekly Report. 2026.

5. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. Opioid Surveillance Update. 2024.

6. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. Playbook for Action: Practical Interventions Small Cities Can Use to Tackle

Canada's Substance Use Crisis. 2026.

7. Association of Municipalities of Ontario. The Opioid Crisis: A Municipal Perspective. 2024.



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