WGDS
WELLINGTON GUELPH DRUG STRATEGY

Shared Direction, Collective Action

Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy 2026-2029 Strategic Plan

Working together for a more connected, compassionate, and evidence-informed community response to substance use.

Prepared by:

Do/able CONSULTING

Message from WGDS Co-Chairs

Substance use is a complex health issue that affects people, families, services, systems, and communities in many different ways. No one organization, sector, or approach can respond to it alone.

That is why the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy (WGDS) exists. WGDS brings together community partners, people with lived and living experience, and others who are connected to this work across Guelph and Wellington County. Our strength comes from working across different perspectives and across the 4 pillars of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety.

This strategic planning process gave us an opportunity to listen, reflect, and make choices about where our collective effort can have the greatest impact over the next three years. It helped us take stock of what is changing around us, where WGDS can make a meaningful contribution, and what will be needed to move forward together.

We also know that the environment around this work will continue to change. Community needs, policy, funding, and the realities facing people who use substances are not static. This plan gives us a shared direction while leaving room to learn, respond, and adjust how we move forward together.

The work ahead belongs to all of us, and we invite you to be part of bringing it to life.

We are grateful to the partners, people with lived and living experience, and community voices who helped shape this plan. The strategy belongs to the wider community of people working toward a stronger response to substance use, and its impact will come from what we are able to do together.

The work ahead belongs to all of us, and we invite you to be part of bringing it to life.

Melissa Kwiatkowski
Co-Chair, Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy
CEO, Guelph Community Health Centre

Rebecca Webb
Co-Chair, Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy
Director of Corporate Services, Stonehenge Therapeutic Community

How We Got Here

This plan was shaped through listening, discussion, and shared decision-making. The work moved through four connected stages.

1 Listen and Learn

We heard from people connected to WGDS and the wider community to understand what is changing, what matters most, and where the coalition can make a difference.

2 Make Sense of What Was Heard

We brought those perspectives together with what we know about the local environment to identify the main issues, opportunities, and connections shaping the work.

3 Choose Where to Focus

We tested and narrowed the emerging ideas to identify the areas where WGDS should focus its attention over the next three years.

4 Build the Plan

We turned those areas of focus into clear priorities, desired results, and an initial path for action.

Vision

We envision communities in Guelph-Wellington free from harm related to substance use

Mission

We take collective action to prevent and respond to local substance use and addiction issues

Meeting the Moment

WGDS is working in a complex and changing environment.

Policy and funding conditions continue to shift. Stigma, misinformation, and polarized public conversations can shape how substance use is understood and how people experiencing substance use are treated. Housing, income, and other basic needs pressures also affect people and the systems around them.

At the same time, WGDS is being asked to maintain a broad, health-focused response. Prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety all have a role, and the connections between them matter.

Needs and access also look different across Guelph and Wellington County, making rural and regional realities important to the work.

This environment calls for a strategy that provides focus without becoming rigid. WGDS needs to be clear about where it can lead, where it can influence, where it can bring people together, and where partners are best positioned to act.

The Four-Pillar Approach

Prevention

Helping prevent substance use by reducing risk, building protective factors, and strengthening education and community resilience.

Treatment & Recovery

Providing a range of supports and services that respond to different needs and goals along the continuum of care.

Harm Reduction

Reducing the health, social, and other harms connected to substance use through evidence-based, health-focused approaches.

Community Safety

Supporting public safety while reducing substance-related harms and helping connect people with appropriate health and social supports.

For more information on the 4-pillar approach visit https://wgdrugstrategy.ca/4-pillar-drug-strategies/

The Path Forward

Through this planning process, we defined where WGDS can add the most value, and what is needed to work together effectively over the next three years.

A clear path has taken shape around how **substance use is understood, how different parts of community response connect, and how the coalition works together to move shared priorities forward.**

How substance use is understood matters. Stigma, beliefs, and misinformation can affect how people who use substances are treated, whether they feel safe seeking support, and the choices communities and systems make. WGDS has an important role in bringing together evidence, lived and living experience, additional trusted voices, and advocacy to help strengthen understanding and support more compassionate, health-focused responses.

A stronger response also depends on seeing the connections across the 4-pillar continuum of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety.

Each has a role, but needs can be missed and gaps can be widened when the different parts of the continuum are viewed separately. WGDS can help build a clearer picture of what is happening across the region, strengthen connections, and bring partners, communities, and decisionmakers together around areas where shared action can make a difference.

A fundamental strength of WGDS is the knowledge, relationships, experience, and reach of the people and organizations around the table. Making partner roles clearer, creating realistic ways to participate, and strengthening how different perspectives inform the work will help turn shared commitment into coordinated action.

Together, these insights point to a strategy that connects stronger public understanding, a more connected community response, and a coalition that is equipped to act together.



Reducing Stigma, Building Support

Shifting public understanding so substance use is met as a health issue, with compassion, evidence, and support.



A Connected 4-Pillar Response

Working across prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety so more needs are seen and addressed.



Strengthening Shared Action

Turning partner commitment into coordinated, sustainable action.

A clear, connected community response that WGDS can carry forward together.

Our Strategic Priorities

Three connected priorities will guide WGDS over the next three years. Together, they focus on strengthening public understanding, building a more connected community response, and turning shared commitment into action.

Reducing Stigma, Building Support

Shifting public understanding so substance use is met as a health issue, with compassion, evidence, and support.

We will build a community where substance use is understood as a complex health issue and met with compassion and evidence-based action.

So that...

Stigma is reduced, people impacted by substance use feel safer seeking support, and local decisions are increasingly shaped by evidence, lived and living experience, and health-focused approaches.

A Connected 4-Pillar Response

Working across prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety so more needs are seen and addressed.

We will build a common understanding and shared action plan, across the 4-pillar continuum of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety, creating a coordinated and responsive system.

So that...

People across Guelph-Wellington benefit from a more connected community response that reflects local needs, reduces harms, supports shared messaging, and strengthens collective action across the 4-pillar continuum.

Strengthening Shared Action

Turning partner commitment into coordinated, sustainable action.

We will strengthen a coalition where collective commitment enables collaborative action, informed by diverse experiences, data, and shared purpose.

So that...

Partners feel connected, clear on their role, and able to contribute in ways that are meaningful, sustainable, and aligned with the coalition's shared strategy and action plan.

Across Everything We Do

The priorities give WGDS its focus, and further core commitments shape how the whole strategy will be carried forward. They help keep the work grounded in the people, places, and learning that will inform and influence decisions along the way.

Lived and Living Experience

People with lived and living experience will help shape how WGDS understands issues, sets priorities, develops messages and actions, and learns from its work. Participation should also be safe, supported, accessible, and sustainable.

Wellington County and Guelph

The strategy needs to reflect the different realities across the region. Rural access, local relationships, service gaps, and different ways of reaching and engaging people will remain visible as the work moves forward.

Learning and Adapting

WGDS will continue to learn from data, lived and living experience, community insight, and partner experience. That learning will help the coalition understand what is changing, what is working, and where the approach may need to evolve.

Equity and Inclusion

WGDS will pay attention to whose experiences and needs are visible in the work, and whose may be missing, so that decisions and actions better reflect the diversity of people and communities across Guelph-Wellington.

Bringing the Strategy to Life

This plan sets the direction for the next three years. How WGDS moves toward it will continue to take shape through shared work. Some actions will build on work already underway while others may strengthen or better connect existing partner work. New shared efforts will also emerge as needs, opportunities, and conditions change. WGDS will regularly check in on the plan to understand what is moving forward, what is being learned, and what may need to change. This will help keep the work focused on the priorities while allowing the approach to evolve as community needs, opportunities, and the wider environment change.

The work ahead belongs to all of us. This strategy creates a shared direction; its impact will come from the many people and organizations across Guelph-Wellington who help bring it to life.

Together, we can help build a community response that is more compassionate, connected, and able to meet people where they are.

From Direction to Action

The strategic direction is now clear. The pages that follow add another level of detail, showing how WGDS can begin to move from shared direction into action.

The priorities describe where WGDS is heading, and the objectives identify the major areas of work needed to move each priority forward. The implementation pathways show how that work could begin. They draw from ideas partners contributed throughout the planning process and include work that may already be underway, work that could be strengthened or connected, and new shared action that may emerge over time.

These pathways are intended as a starting point, not fixed three-year workplans. How they are carried forward will continue to be shaped through collective work planning, partner participation, working groups, and regular check-ins on progress and learning.

The possible measures provide an initial way to understand whether progress is being made. They will be refined as the work becomes clearer and WGDS learns more about what information is most useful to track.

Reducing Stigma, Building Support

We will build a community where substance use is understood as a complex health issue and met with compassion and evidence-based action.

Shifting public understanding so substance use is met as a health issue, with compassion, evidence, and support.

So that... Stigma is reduced, people impacted by substance use feel safer seeking support, and local decisions are increasingly shaped by evidence, lived and living experience, and health-focused approaches.

Objectives:

- We will use evidence and lived and living experience to understand and address the conditions, beliefs, and barriers that drive stigma.
- We will work with trusted partners and community voices to reach audiences who can help shift public understanding.
- We will influence policy and funding decisions in Guelph-Wellington through a strategy for advocacy and government relations.

Implementation Pathway

Early collective groundwork

- Better understand current community-based anti-stigma efforts and identify the local beliefs, conditions, and barriers driving stigma and misinformation.
- Identify priority audiences, missing voices, trusted messengers, community partners, and decisionmakers.
- Develop an advocacy and government relations approach that clarifies audiences, key messages, roles, risks, and decision points.
- Collaboratively develop and test core messaging with peers and direct service workers/staff.

Shared action

- Develop, adapt, or deliver public education materials and shared messaging in partnership with people with lived and living experience and partners.
- Engage trusted partners, spokespeople, and community voices to help reach priority audiences.
- Advance a focused anti-stigma and public understanding campaign through coalition, partner, collaborative, and community channels.
- Use evidence, community insight, and lived and living experience to collaboratively support clear advocacy messages with local decisionmakers.
- Strengthen relationships with partners and decisionmakers who can help shift public understanding, policy, and funding conditions.

Learning and next steps

- Review which messages, audiences, partnerships, and advocacy approaches appear most useful.
- Assess whether the work is contributing to stronger public understanding, reduced stigma, and better conditions for health-focused decisions.
- Identify what should be sustained, adapted, or carried into the next phase of implementation.

Possible Measures:

- Campaign reach and engagement across priority audiences.
- Number and range of trusted partners, spokespeople, and community voices engaged.
- Examples of advocacy messages, submissions, meetings, or relationship-building with decisionmakers.
- Evidence that public messaging reflects lived and living experience and is useful for partners.
- Changes in public attitudes, help-seeking, or service-use patterns, where measurable.

A Connected 4-Pillar Response

We will build a common understanding and shared action plan, across the 4-pillar continuum of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety, creating a coordinated and responsive system.

Working across prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety so more needs are seen and addressed.

So that... People across Guelph-Wellington benefit from a more connected community response that reflects local needs, reduces harms, supports shared messaging, and strengthens collective action across the 4-pillar continuum.

Objectives:

- We will identify needs, gaps, and who is missing from the work using data, lived and living experience, and community insight.
- We will build and act upon a shared strategy and action plan, based on identified gaps, needs, and emerging issues across the 4-pillar continuum, working both within the coalition and with partners, communities, and decisionmakers.
- We will develop and use shared messages, tools, public education resources, and communication channels that support the shared action plan and help partners and priority audiences understand the 4-pillar continuum.

Implementationl Pathway

Early collective groundwork

- Establish shared principles for how data, lived and living experience, and community insight will be used to identify needs, understand gaps, and guide shared action.
- Map current work, gaps, partner roles, audiences, communications tools, and opportunities across the four-pillar continuum.
- Identify where prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety are already connected, and where there are gaps, tensions, imbalances, or opportunities for stronger coordination.
- Clarify and utilize the structure needed to develop and steward a shared action plan among partners, including working group roles, partner contributions, shared decision points, communication channels, and a practical way to track progress.

A Connected 4-Pillar Response

We will build a common understanding and shared action plan, across the 4-pillar continuum of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety, creating a coordinated and responsive system.

Working across prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety so more needs are seen and addressed.

Implementation Pathway Continued....

Shared action

- Complete, update, or draw from regional needs and gaps assessment work, with meaningful involvement from Peer Advisory Committee members and other people with lived and living experience.
- Convene partners to build shared understanding of the four-pillar continuum and identify priority areas for coordinated action.
- Develop a shared, collaborative action plan that names priority actions, roles, timelines, partners, decision points, and measures of progress.
- Begin collaboratively activating the shared action plan through working groups, member-led and partner-led actions, coordinated communications, and engagement with relevant communities and decisionmakers.
- Use shared messages, tools, public education resources, and communication channels to help partners explain the four-pillar continuum and build support for the shared action plan.
- Review early collaborative implementation with partners and people with lived and living experience and collectively adjust the action plan based on what is learned.

Learning and next steps

- Review progress on the shared action plan with WGDS partners and Peer Advisory Committee members, including what has advanced, what has stalled, what is being learned, and what may need to shift, adapt, or begin.
- Assess whether WGDS and its partners are working in a more collaborative and coordinated way across the four-pillar continuum.
- Document outcomes, gaps addressed, lessons learned, and priorities for the next phase of shared four-pillar continuum work.

Possible Measures:

- Shared action plan developed, collaboratively activated, and reviewed with partners.
- Needs, gaps, populations, or geographies identified through assessment work.
- Number and balance of shared actions advanced across the 4-pillar continuum.
- Evidence of cross-pillar coordination, partner contribution, or shared implementation.
- Member and partner use of shared messages, tools, and public education resources to support the shared action plan.

Strengthening Shared Action



We will strengthen a coalition where collective commitment enables collaborative action, informed by diverse experiences, data, and shared purpose.

Turning partner commitment into coordinated, sustainable action.

So that... Partners feel connected, clear on their role, and able to contribute in ways that are meaningful, sustainable, and aligned with the coalition's shared strategy and action plan.

Objectives:

- We will clarify partners' roles, responsibilities, and areas of alignment.
- We will enable the sustainable and accessible participation of partners, contributing to the coalition's shared strategy and action plan.
- We will create stronger feedback loops so lived and living experience, partner insight, and community input shape our decisions and actions.

Implementation Pathway

Early collective groundwork

- Conduct a member audit or survey to understand current roles, engagement levels, capacity, and areas of alignment across the four-pillar continuum.
- Clarify what the strategy is asking of partners, including where partners may lead, contribute, support, share information, or help carry messages.
- Identify where WGDS priorities align with partners' existing work and organizational strategic priorities, so contribution can dovetail with work already underway.
- Define feedback loop goals, including how lived and living experience, member insight, and community input will shape decisions and action.

Shared action

- Share member audit findings and use them to clarify roles, participation options, and areas of shared ownership.
- Develop or update a shared commitment framework that reflects the strategy and the different ways partners can contribute.
- Confirm working group mandates, leads, and connection points to the shared strategy and action plan.
- Strengthen structures that support rural participation and regional representation.
- Establish regular feedback practices, including PAC updates, member input loops, community insight, and communication back to partners about what changed as a result.
- Support partners to connect WGDS work with aligned organizational priorities, so participation is feasible, useful, and mutually reinforcing.

Learning and next steps

- Review participation patterns, member clarity, shared ownership, and feedback loop effectiveness.
- Assess whether partners feel more connected to the strategy and better able to contribute, and how the work of the coalition is being implemented by the partners.
- Renew the shared commitment framework and recommend structures for the next planning cycle.

Possible Measures:

- Partner clarity on roles, responsibilities, and areas of alignment.
- Participation rates in WGDS meetings, working groups, and coalition activities.
- Number of working groups with identified leads, active mandates, and sustained participation.
- Partner sense of shared purpose, trust, and connection.
- Evidence that lived and living experience, partner insight, and community input shaped decisions or actions.

Keeping the Strategy Alive Over Time

WGDS will use regular strategy management check-ins to keep the plan connected to what is happening in the work and in the wider environment.

Regular reviews will bring together updates on progress, what is being learned, and what context is changing. The goal is not simply to report on activity. It is to make sense of what is happening and decide where greater clarity, support, or a change in approach may be needed.

What the Reviews Will Look At

- What has happened since the last review?
- What are we noticing about implementation and emerging results?
- What has changed in or around the work?
- Does this raise a broader question about an objective, priority, or the strategy?
- Where is attention, support, or calibration needed?

A challenge with one pathway action may call for a focused adjustment. A pattern across several actions may raise a question about an objective. A significant change in context may invite a broader conversation about the strategy. Continuing the current approach with greater clarity or support can also be the right decision.

Over time, this rhythm will help WGDS keep implementation connected to purpose, learning connected to decisions, and the strategy visible throughout its three-year lifespan.

A Regular Review Rhythm

1. Gather

Bring together updates from the people involved in the work.

2. Make Sense

Pull together what appears significant: progress, results, obstacles, changes, and questions.

3. Calibrate

Consider what the information may mean for implementation and the strategy.

4. Close the Loop

Record decisions, next steps, support needed, and what to keep watching.

This plan gives WGDS a shared direction and a practical starting point for collective action. Its strength will come from how partners, people with lived and living experience, and communities bring it to life together.

The work ahead will require focus, collaboration, and continued learning. By staying connected to the priorities and to one another, WGDS can keep moving toward a more compassionate, coordinated, and evidence-informed community response to substance use.

WGDS

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