



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:

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

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Co-Chair, Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy
Director of Corporate Services, Stonehenge
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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.



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