

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**Local harm reduction and drug policy organizations host provincial dialogue on the overdose crisis and COVID-19**

*A gathering of community leaders to find a path forward during two public health crises*

Moncton, NB—The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, in partnership with ENSEMBLE Moncton, Avenue B Harm Reduction, and AIDS New Brunswick, are hosting the province’s first-ever public health dialogue on the overdose crisis and COVID-19 pandemic on Tuesday, November 17 and Thursday, November 19. [Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the Overdose Crisis](#) will gather leaders from diverse sectors of society to identify and move towards policy solutions to the overdose crisis in the context of COVID-19. Participants will include leaders from health care, government, First Nations, and law enforcement, to people with lived/living experience, and harm reduction.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the illegal drug toxicity death crisis as a catastrophic failure of Canada’s current approach to drugs. Governments have moved mountains in response to the COVID-19 pandemic while a coherent pan-Canadian approach to over 16,000 overdose deaths in the past four and a half years has failed to materialize,” said Donald MacPherson, executive director of the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition. “We hope *Getting to Tomorrow* will inform, engage, and inspire Canadians to become more involved in building a new approach to drugs based on principles of public health and human rights, and lead to improved health and safety for all in our communities.”

The project will also use learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic to improve Canada’s overdose response at a time when lives are being lost at an unprecedented rate. More specifically, *Getting to Tomorrow* has three main goals.

1. Accelerate the adoption of public health- and human rights-based drug policies in Canada
2. Empower decision makers and the public to take evidence-based actions by providing the latest research on policies that could end the overdose crisis
3. Engage the public in dialogue on issues related to substance use and drug policy

“Collectively we serve over 3,000 New Brunswickers who use substances. These people are our sisters, brothers, parents, co-workers, and fellow New Brunswickers,” said Deborah Warren, executive director of ENSEMBLE Moncton. “They struggle to exist amidst this crisis facing daily barriers to treatment, primary health care and basic necessities. Their plight is dismal. Policies need to change to ensure they are no longer ignored.”

Never before in Canada’s history have communities confronted two concurrent public health crises like the overdose crisis and coronavirus pandemic. Among those at greatest risk are people who use drugs. Overdose deaths have risen across Canada and individual health and safety is more precarious than ever because of a disrupted drug supply and public health guidance that makes it harder for those affected by substance use disorder to access services.

*Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the Overdose Crisis* is supported by Health Canada and is a collaboration with Simon Fraser University’s Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. [www.gettingtotomorrow.ca](http://www.gettingtotomorrow.ca)

**Contact**

Peter Kim  
Strategic Communications Manager  
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition

604-787-4043  
[peter\\_k@sfu.ca](mailto:peter_k@sfu.ca)

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#### **About Canadian Drug Policy Coalition**

The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (CDPC) is a coalition of 50 organizations and 4,000 individuals working to support the development of progressive drug policy grounded in science, guided by public health principles, and respectful of human rights. The CDPC operates as a project within Simon Fraser University under the Centre for Applied Research in Addiction and Mental Health. The CDPC seeks to include people who use drugs and those harmed by the war on drugs in moving toward a healthier Canadian society free of stigma and social exclusion.

#### **About Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue**

Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue creates real-world impact for society's most pressing challenges by using dialogue and engagement to co-create solutions, exchange knowledge, support community-engaged learning, and to build the capacity of others in the knowledge and practice of dialogue. They strive to bring together diverse voices, stories, perspectives and experiences, with a goal to increase understanding about others and ourselves. It is a conversational process intended to help us gain insight into complex problems to which no one person holds the answer.

#### **About ENSEMBLE Moncton**

ENSEMBLE's mission is to alleviate complex social issues through empowerment and hope and build a community that fosters diversity, inclusion, and health. The agency was formerly known as AIDS Moncton and incorporated in 1989. One of ENSEMBLE's strengths is building community partnerships that work collectively to address issues affecting the people they serve.

#### **About Avenue B Harm Reduction**

Avenue B Harm Reduction (formerly AIDS Saint John) has been providing harm reduction services since 1988. Located in the Waterloo Village they are a robust community organization moving harm reduction ahead based on research and evidence.

#### **About AIDS New Brunswick**

AIDS New Brunswick Inc. is a provincial organization that aims to promote and support the health and well-being of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS while helping to reduce the spread of HIV, Hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted and blood borne infections in New Brunswick through the provision of prevention, education, and support initiatives.