

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Local harm reduction and drug policy organizations seek solutions to Hamilton's overdose crisis at first-ever public health dialogue on drug toxicity deaths and policy change

Hamilton's overdose death rate is 34% higher than the rest of Ontario and overdoses have increased by 42% during the pandemic

Hamilton, ON—The AIDS Network, Keeping Six, and Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (Simon Fraser University) today are hosting the region's first-ever public health dialogue on the overdose crisis and solutions to the mounting drug toxicity deaths across Ontario. [Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the Overdose Crisis](#) is being held on Tuesday, July 27 and Thursday, July 29 and **brings together leaders from diverse sectors of society to identify and move towards policy solutions to the overdose/drug poisoning crisis.** Participants include leaders from health care, government, First Nations, and law enforcement, to people with lived/living experience of drug use, and harm reduction.

"Hamilton's overdose death rate is 34% higher than the rest of the province and overdoses have increased by 42% during the pandemic. Despite being a city of over 500,000 people, we have one Consumption and Treatment Site, a small informal safe supply that only serves about 20 patients, and a group of Hamilton residents who are fighting the relocation of the Consumption and Treatment Site to their neighbourhood," said Marcie McIlveen, outreach co-coordinator at Keeping Six. "We urgently need Hamiltonians to understand that people who use drugs are part of our community, and we deserve to be part of creating a city where our lives matter."

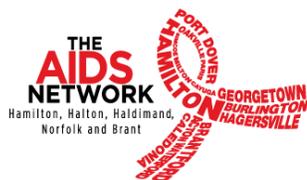
By bringing together community leaders from a diverse range of sectors, the two-day event hopes to create **shared understanding and common purpose that will trigger collaboration and catalyze policy changes** necessary to save lives. More specifically, *Getting to Tomorrow* aims to

1. Accelerate the adoption of public health- and human rights-based drug policies in Canada, which includes "safe supply" and decriminalization
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 in an effort to reduce stigma

"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 20,000 overdose deaths in the past five 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."

WATCH VIDEO: [Getting to Tomorrow](#)

Never before in Canada's history have communities confronted two concurrent public health crises like the overdose crisis and COVID-19 pandemic. The country is experiencing record levels of opioid-



related overdoses due to an increasingly toxic drug supply. In 2020, the most recent year with complete data, there were **6,214 opioid-related deaths** (a 62% increase from the previous year). Ontario saw the highest number, with **2,425**. It is precisely at this critical moment in time that bold policy change is needed.

Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the Overdose Crisis is supported by Health Canada and is facilitated in partnership with Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue.

www.gettingtotomorrow.ca

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About Getting to Tomorrow

National public health community dialogues organized by the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition and local community partners aimed at bringing together leaders from diverse sectors of society (business, government, health care, law enforcement) to come to a shared understanding of the overdose crisis and solutions to it. The goals are to reduce stigma, misinformation, and divisions in society preventing communities from moving forward on implementing public health- and human rights-based drug policies. www.gettingtotomorrow.ca

About The AIDS Network

The AIDS Network responds to the impact of HIV on the health and well-being of individuals and diverse communities in Hamilton, Halton, Haldimand, Norfolk, and Brant. We see a world without new infections and a full and healthy life for people living with and vulnerable to HIV. Since 1986, The AIDS Network has been the primary voice for HIV/AIDS prevention, education and support.

<https://aidsnetwork.ca/>

About Keeping Six Hamilton

Keeping Six Hamilton Harm Reduction Action League is a community-based organization that defends the rights, dignity, and humanity of people who use drugs. It was formed in response to the ravages of the opioid crisis and out of recognition of the need for an organized voice for people with lived and living experience of substance use at the many stakeholder tables attempting to manage and overcome the drug epidemic in Hamilton. Our membership is primarily people with lived experience of drug use and is supported by those who love and care for them. <https://keepingsix.org/>

About Canadian Drug Policy Coalition

The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (CDPC) is a coalition of 50 organizations and 6,000 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 in the Faculty of Health Sciences. 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. www.drugpolicy.ca

