

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 14, 2021

Coalition of local and national harm reduction and drug policy organizations seek solutions to Canada's overdose crisis at Ottawa's first-ever public health dialogue on rising drug toxicity deaths and policy solutions

Opioid-related deaths have nearly doubled in Ottawa during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ottawa, ON—The Drug Users Advocacy League, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, Ottawa Inner City Health, Ottawa Public Health, and Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (Simon Fraser University) today hosted the region's first-ever public health dialogue on the overdose crisis and policy solutions to the mounting drug toxicity deaths in Ottawa. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been [over 120 overdose deaths](#) in Ottawa. In response, [Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the Overdose Crisis](#) is being held on Tuesday, September 14 and Thursday, September 16 and **brings together leaders from diverse sectors of society to identify and move towards policy solutions to the overdose/drug poisoning crisis**. Participants include people with lived/living experience of drug use and harm reduction to leaders from healthcare, government, First Nations, and law enforcement.

"We have been fighting a relentless toxic opiate crisis in Ottawa since 2017. Our best efforts are simply not enough to stop the deaths and harms to our community," said Wendy Muckle, CEO of Ottawa Inner City Health. "We desperately need a change in drug policy."

"Since 2012, when we had approximately 30 fatal drug overdoses in Ottawa, we have added as a city amazing initiatives like supervised injection sites, safer supply, and a vast naloxone program; yet in 2020, we lost over 120 people in our city due to overdose," said Sean LeBlanc, founder of the Drug Users Advocacy League. "What else can we do but fix the root of this tragic issue and change the policy."

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** needed to save lives. Specifically, *Getting to Tomorrow* aims to

1. Accelerate the adoption of public health- and human rights-based drug policies in Canada, including "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/drug poisoning crisis
3. Engage the public in dialogue on issues related to substance use and drug policy in an effort to reduce stigma

"Governments have moved mountains in response to the COVID-19 pandemic while a coherent pan-Canadian approach to over 21,000 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](#)



Canada is experiencing record levels of opioid-related overdose/drug poisoning deaths 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, and [Getting to Tomorrow Ottawa](#) is hoping to surface and advance those changes.

Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the Overdose Crisis is supported by Health Canada and Simon Fraser University's Faculty of Health Sciences. <http://www.gettingtomorrow.ca/ottawa>

Contact

Peter Kim
Director of Communications and Digital Engagement
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition
peter_k@sfu.ca

– 30 –

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 (harm reduction, people who use drugs, business, government, healthcare, law enforcement) to come to a shared understanding of the overdose crisis and solutions to it. The goals are to identify and help implement public health-based policy solutions, and reduce stigma, misinformation, and divisions in society preventing communities from moving forward on those solutions. www.gettingtomorrow.ca

About Drug Users Advocacy League

The Drug Users Advocacy League is an independent group of drug consumers, ex-consumer, and their allies who fight for the rights of those who use drugs and our community in the Ottawa area. Though we do not condone nor condemn drug use, we believe in complete harm reduction, and aim to improve the safety and education of and towards drug consumers. We also aim to end the horrible stigma that drug users face. Our purpose is to ensure the safety of those who consume drugs and the community-at-large, and to ensure that the people who consume drugs can do so with the proper education and opportunities to stay healthy. <https://dualottawa.wordpress.com/about/>

About Sandy Hill Community Health Centre

Sandy Hill Community Health Centre (SHCHC) is a not-for-profit French language services designated organization located in downtown Ottawa. Its mission is to lead and innovate in person-centered primary healthcare and community wellbeing. From its initial opening in 1975, the Centre now provides a multitude of programs and services through an integrated model of care, which includes primary healthcare, addiction and mental health services, housing-first intensive case management, children and youth programs, health promotion, chronic disease management, specialty clinics for addictions medicine/HIV/Hep C, street-involved youth and social pediatrics, community development and engagement services. <https://www.shchc.ca/>

About Ottawa Inner City Health

Ottawa Inner City Health (OICH) is an organization that provides healthcare to homeless and street communities in Ottawa. OICH was created by the organizations who serve the homeless in Ottawa. In the summer of 1998, a group of managers who operated programs for people affected by homelessness



Getting to Tomorrow

Ending the Overdose Crisis

met to discuss growing concerns about the health needs of those they provided service to.
<https://www.ottawainnercityhealth.ca/>

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's Faculty of Health Sciences. It 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



Sandy Hill
Community Health Centre
Centre de santé
communautaire Côte-de-Sable



Canadian Drug
Policy Coalition
Coalition canadienne
des politiques
sur les drogues