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**Coalition of local and national harm reduction and drug policy organizations push for policy change at public health dialogue on overdose/drug poisoning crisis**

*Barrie region has among the highest overdose rates in Ontario.*

Barrie, ON—John Howard Society Simcoe & Muskoka, Gilbert Centre, Indigenous Harm Reduction Network, 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 the community. In 2020, there were 134 opioid poisoning deaths in Simcoe Muskoka for a rate of [22.2 deaths per 100,000](#)—significantly higher than the provincial rate of 16.4 deaths per 100,000. In response, [Getting to Tomorrow Barrie](#) is being held on Tuesday, October 19 and Thursday, October 21 and **brings together leaders from diverse sectors of society to identify and move towards policy solutions to the overdose/drug poisoning crisis.**

“Decriminalization is the simplest, safest, and easiest step in reducing social ills that intersect drug use and poverty, and these are helping fuel overdose death and drug poisonings,” said Silas Randell, a harm reduction worker at the Gilbert Centre.

Participants include people with lived/living experience of drug use and harm reduction to leaders from healthcare, government, First Nations, and law enforcement. 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

**WATCH VIDEO: [Getting to Tomorrow](#)**

“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.”



The Barrie region is among the hardest hit by the drug poisoning/overdose crisis. Preliminary data shows that there were [134 confirmed and probable opioid-related deaths in Simcoe Muskoka in 2020](#), which was more than 60% higher than the average of 81 deaths from the previous three years. Provincially, there were [2,728 opioid deaths from June 2020 to May 2021](#), which is over 56% higher than the previous 12 months. In Ontario, there have been [over 200 deaths in 12 of the 15 months since COVID-19](#), a threshold that has never been previously reached.

It is precisely at this critical moment in time that bold policy change is needed, and [Getting to Tomorrow Barrie](#) 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.

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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, 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.gettingtotomorrow.ca](http://www.gettingtotomorrow.ca)

#### About John Howard Society Simcoe & Muskoka

The John Howard Society of Ontario is a not-for-profit organization of 19 local offices dedicated to effective, just, and humane responses to crime and its causes. For more than 90 years, we've worked to keep humanity in justice. Today, we continue to build a safer Ontario by supporting the people and communities affected by the criminal justice system. Our local offices deliver more than 80 evidence-based programs and services focused on prevention, intervention, and re-integration across the province. <https://johnhoward.on.ca/muskoka/>



### **About Indigenous Harm Reduction Network**

The Indigenous Harm Reduction Network began in late 2019 and forged ahead in the first two months of 2020. The planning began to host a gathering of Indigenous people who use drugs and substances as well as Indigenous harm reduction service providers in Toronto. This was to provide a safer space to share stories and provide support. <http://ihrn.ca/>

### **About Gilbert Centre**

The Gilbert Centre is a community-based, not-for-profit, charitable organization that has been providing programs and services as the AIDS Committee of Simcoe County for over 25 years. In 2015, in part to recognize the reality of people with HIV not developing AIDS, but living healthy lives with HIV, the organization changed its name from the AIDS Committee of Simcoe County to the Gilbert Centre for Social and Support Services. The Gilbert Centre, named after our founder Ed Gilbert, not only reflects the change in HIV, but also embraces the expansion of programming to serve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender individuals and families in the Simcoe Muskoka area. <https://gilbertcentre.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. 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](http://www.drugpolicy.ca)

