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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

80% of overdose/drug poisoning deaths have occurred in the city of Gatineau.

Gatineau, QC—The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (Simon Fraser University) and CIPTO today hosted the region’s first-ever public health dialogue on the overdose crisis and solutions to the mounting drug toxicity deaths across Quebec. [Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the Overdose Crisis](#) is being held on Tuesday, December 14 and Thursday, December 16 and **brings together leaders from diverse sectors of society to identify and advance policy solutions to the overdose/drug poisoning crisis.** Participants include leaders from healthcare, government, First Nations, and law enforcement, to people with lived/living experience of drug use, and harm reduction.

“People who have lived experience with substance use are the most familiar with the impacts of Canada’s policies related to drugs and other substances. As active contributors to our society, it is time to create more space for these voices to be heard so that we can come up with practical, pragmatic solutions that can have a significant impact on the community,” said Janick Allyson, project coordinator at the Centre d’Intervention et de Prévention en Toxicomanie de l’Outaouais (CIPTO). “It is not possible to have these discussions without the people who are most affected.”

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 22,000 overdose deaths in the past six 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. Last year, 547 people across Quebec died of accidental drug poisonings (overdoses), a 30 per cent increase from the year before. Across Canada, an epidemic of fatal drug poisonings has killed more than 22,000 people since 2016. These are preventable deaths fuelled by Canada’s current drug policies based on prohibition, which creates an illegal drug market contaminated by toxic drugs. Bold policy change is desperately needed to stem the tide of fatalities, and public health officials, politicians, and even police have been calling for/supporting a different path forward—a new tomorrow. *Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the*

Overdose Crisis hopes to articulate that path forward.

Getting to Tomorrow: Ending the Overdose Crisis is supported by Health Canada in partnership with 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 identify 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.gettingtomorrow.ca

About Centre d'Intervention et de Prévention en Toxicomanie de l'Outaouais (CIPTO)

CIPTO is an independent grassroots organization committed to harm reduction. It offers intake, support, and guidance services to people who use drugs and to their families and friends. CIPTO has five key objectives that are in line with its organizational values (respect, partnership, and innovation): to raise awareness and educate in order to empower people in the community to make informed choices that can improve their quality of life; initiate and implement innovative and proactive measures within the communities where people at risk of developing addiction problems live; offer intervention services to people experiencing addiction problems, based on a harm-reduction and motivational approach; educate and support those who are close to or living with people experiencing substance abuse problems; and build partnerships and collaborate with various stakeholders in the community. www.cipto.qc.ca

About Canadian Drug Policy Coalition

The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (CDPC) is a coalition of 60 organizations and 7,000 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