

Brantford-Brant Community

DRUGS
STRATEGY
ACTION PLAN

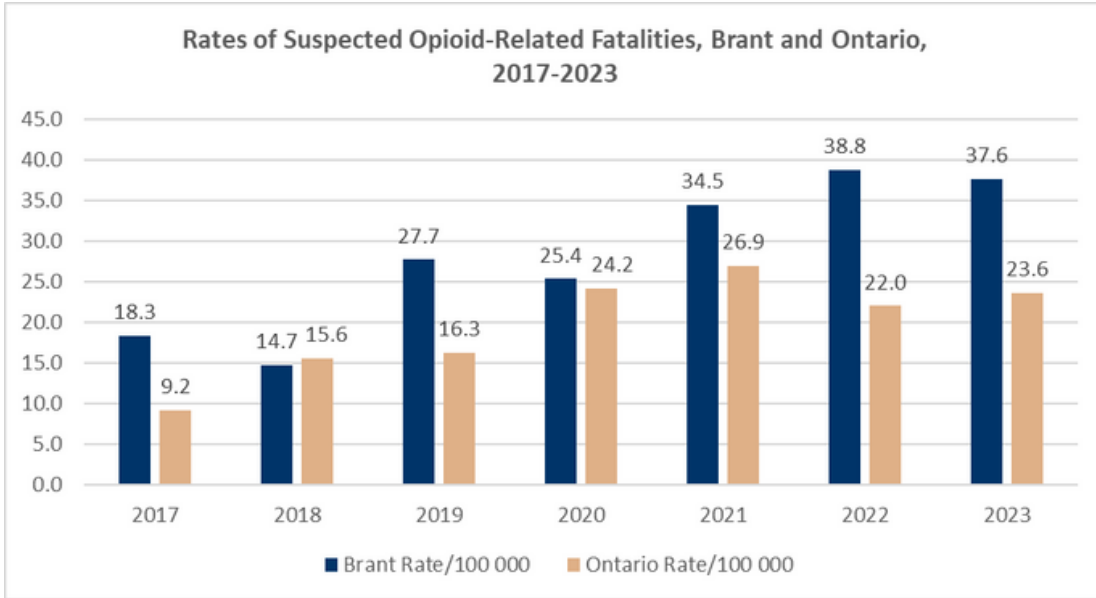
2024

INTRODUCTION

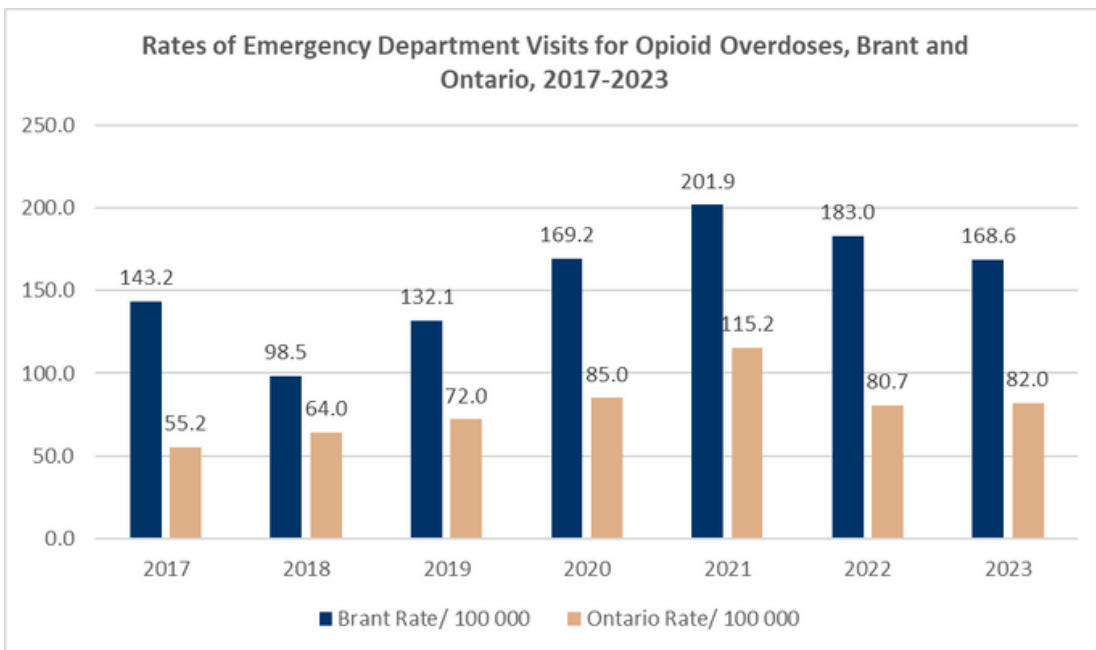


Canada's overdose crisis continued in 2023: according to data from the first six months of the year (the most recent national data available), nationwide rates of opioid overdose deaths were **5% higher** than in 2022, and remain significantly elevated above pre-pandemic levels. From January to June, an average of **22 people per day** died of opioid toxicity in Canada. **Almost all** of these deaths were accidental, and just over half involved a stimulant in addition to opioids.

The rate of opioid-related fatalities in Brantford-Brant remained similar in 2023 compared to 2022, and continues to be about 1.5 times the provincial average. Brant's rate of emergency department visits for opioid overdose was also statistically similar between 2022 and 2023 and remains twice the provincial average. People in Brantford-Brant are also dealing with a wide range of other drug-related harms not captured in these statistics: skin and soft tissue infections, transmission of infectious diseases, discarded syringes, and the far-reaching negative effects of stigma on both people who use drugs and their families and friends.



Note: Death data for 2023 should be considered as preliminary and is subject to change. *Source: Ontario Opioid-Related Death Database. January 2017 – December 2023. Toronto, ON: Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario; data extracted January 9, 2024.*



Source: National Ambulatory Care Reporting System (NACRS). January 2017 – December 2023. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Institute for Health Information; data extracted January 9, 2024.

The factors driving the overdose crisis are complex. There is no single cause, although the unpredictability and contamination of the illicit drug supply is recognized as a **major driver**. This nationwide crisis demands a robust response from every level of government and organizations working at every scale: national, provincial, and local. The Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy aims to do everything that we can at the local level to achieve our vision: a healthy, safe community free from the harms of substance use.

Reducing the harms of substance use is a multifaceted endeavor, including prevention and mitigation of the use of substances; reducing overdoses; reducing drug use-related infectious disease transmission; preventing and treating injection-related skin and soft tissue infections; improving access to withdrawal management and addiction treatment; and reducing stigma. We know that no municipality can fully achieve these goals alone, but we also know that no response to the harms of substance use is complete without a robust, coordinated, municipal response that spans the four pillars of prevention and education; treatment and recovery; enforcement and justice; and harm reduction.

From August through November 2023, the Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee met to take stock of the progress made in 2023 and to identify new initiatives to tackle in 2024. As always, we were guided by the 38 recommendations laid out in the original **Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy (2016)**. This process was led by the Core Members of the Coordinating Committee:

- St. Leonard's Community Services (SLCS)
- Grand River Community Health Centre (GRCHC)
- The AIDS Network (TAN)
- Child and Family Services of the Grand Erie
- The Brantford Police Service
- The Brantford Substance Users' Network (BSUN)
- The Brant County Health Unit (BCHU)
- Brant Community Healthcare System (BCHS)
- Woodview Mental Health and Autism Services
- The County of Brant
- The City of Brantford



It also involved input from Advisory Members, including the Six Nations Integrated Drugs Strategy, the Ontario Health Team (OHT) Mental Health and Addictions Steering Committee, Wilfred Laurier University's Brantford Campus, and the Brant-Brantford Paramedic Services.

This Action Plan contains the result of that planning process.

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

The **Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy's 2023 Action Plan** marked the first time since before the pandemic that the Drugs Strategy undertook a comprehensive annual planning process. It was a year of launching new projects, renewing our commitment to ongoing projects, and continuing to optimize the Drugs Strategy's structure and expand our membership. The Drugs Strategy's Core Members, along with our Advisory Members and other community partners, worked hard to move the 14 initiatives in the 2023 Action Plan forward.

One of those initiatives was to raise the profile of the Drugs Strategy. We began this work last February with the release of the 2023 Action Plan alongside our **updated website**, and continued throughout the year with public presentations and ongoing relationship-building. 2023 also saw the development of a comprehensive Drugs Strategy Communications Plan, which will guide communications work through the end of 2024.

TAN, SLCS, the Brantford Public Library, and BCHU completed a 7-month pilot of fentanyl test strip distribution in 2023. Fentanyl test strips are a simple tool that allow people who use drugs to detect whether fentanyl is present in the drugs that they are intending to consume, and to use that information to make more informed choices about their use of these substances.

BCHU, in partnership with the members of the Surveillance Working Group, completed a redesign of the **Opioid Information System** and monthly surveillance reports. The group also completed an evaluation of the current overdose-related public safety alerts system and implemented its recommendations.





Many overdose deaths in Brantford-Brant occur when an individual is using drugs alone, with no one present to administer naloxone. The Harm Reduction & Anti-Stigma Working Group developed a public education campaign to promote virtual safe consumption services: the National Overdose Response Service and the Brave overdose detection app, both of which can assist with overdose response for individuals who use drugs alone. The working group developed stickers to be distributed on harm reduction supplies, naloxone kits, and sharps disposal containers.

In 2023, Drugs Strategy partners supported the establishment of Brantford-Brant's first official after-hours harm reduction supply access point at Rosewood House. BCHU and SLCS, with support and input from other Drugs Strategy partners, have also been working with the REACH Nexus team at the MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions to bring an **Our Healthbox** machine to Brantford, expanding access to HIV self-testing kits, naloxone and other wellness supplies into overnight hours. BCHU and SLCS are currently finalizing the operational plan and hope to launch the machine in early 2024.

The Drugs Strategy also expanded available harm reduction supplies to include wound care kits. Skin and soft tissue infections disproportionately impact the health and well-being of people who use drugs, and have been **identified** as among the most common reasons that people who use drugs visit emergency departments. To address this need, medical staff from BCHU and GRCHC identified a number of key wound care products to be made available to community partners through the Health Unit. These supplies are now being distributed to those who need them through Brantford-Brant's harm reduction supply access points.

In addition to these completed projects, the Drugs Strategy also made progress on a number of multi-year initiatives, including scaling up the PreVenture program, implementing anti-stigma education, working towards opening a Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) site, and supporting GRCHC's safer supply pilot. Work on these initiatives will continue in 2024 and they are discussed in more detail on pages 11, 12, 14 and 20 respectively.

In 2023, the Drugs Strategy also conducted two exploratory initiatives: the first to assess interest and readiness among service providers for universal screening for substance use disorders (SUD) and the second to explore service availability and appropriateness for seniors who use drugs. Both these initiatives were intended to lay the groundwork for more robust work on these topics in 2024, and the next phase of each is discussed on pages 10 and 22.



As part of our commitment to identify and address gaps in drug-related youth engagement, prevention, and service provision, the Drugs Strategy built relationships with other stakeholders in the community working at the intersection of youth and drug-related issues, including youth-focused City of Brantford staff, Teaching Intelligent Choices to Kids (TICK), the Youth and Families Strategic Leadership Table, Child and Family Services of the Grand Erie, and both the Grand Erie and Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Boards. In addition to meetings with the Drugs Strategy Coordinator, some of these groups also presented to the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee about their ongoing drug-related work. The addition of Child and Family Services of the Grand Erie as a Core Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee member was an exciting outcome of improving relationships with the youth sector in Brantford-Brant.

The 2023 Action Plan proposed that the Drugs Strategy develop its own plan to fill gaps in drug-related youth engagement, prevention, and service provision. However, through engagement with allies already working in this space, we learned that many of them are getting ready to pilot new content or launch exciting new phases of their work. Because of the many changes already happening in this space in Brantford-Brant, the Coordinating Committee decided not to develop its own plan to fill gaps at this time, and instead to focus on supporting the work of our allies.

While the Drugs Strategy accomplished a great deal in 2023, two initiatives did not move forward as we hoped. The work to launch a drug treatment court was stalled for much of the year, due to limited capacity in the criminal justice system to implement new initiatives while dealing with the backlogs created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Drug Treatment Court Working Group has discussed strategies to overcome this barrier and intends to continue working to do so in 2024. Unanticipated staffing challenges prevented us from beginning work to improve the quality of services in the community for Indigenous people who use drugs. The Coordinating Committee has committed to prioritizing this work in 2024.



2024 ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW

- 1** In collaboration with the OHT Mental Health and Addictions Steering Committee, explore implementation of universal screening for SUD in Brantford-Brant.
- 2** Scale up the availability of the PreVenture program.
- 3** Launch a drug treatment court.
- 4** Reduce stigma against people who use drugs through sector-specific anti-stigma education.
- 5** Expand support for families of people who use drugs.
- 6** Open a Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) site in Brantford.
- 7** Build relationships between the Drugs Strategy and Indigenous-led organizations in Brantford-Brant and explore ways to improve the quality of services in the community for Indigenous people who use drugs.
- 8** In partnership with the OHT Mental Health and Addictions Integration Lead, convene a working group to identify inefficiencies and gaps in current withdrawal management clinical pathways, and make recommendations for improvement.
- 9** Launch a peer support community of practice for Brantford-Brant.
- 10** Assess support needs of businesses and service providers located in downtown Brantford to reduce the harms of drug use in their establishments, and surrounding areas.
- 11** Support the evaluation and scale-up of Brantford-Brant's safer supply pilot.
- 12** Expand access to drug checking services.

2024 ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW

- 13** Expand awareness of and access to naloxone among seniors.
- 14** Expand access to harm reduction supplies in the County of Brant.
- 15** Formalize pathways for collaboration between the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee and the OHT Mental Health & Addictions Steering Committee.
- 16** Develop a formal process for ensuring that future years' Action Plans are developed with input from people who use drugs and people with lived experience of drug use.
- 17** Expand access to low barrier pregnancy and reproductive health care among pregnant people with lived or living experience of drug use by supporting the integration of an expanded midwifery care model into Brantford-Brant's treatment, harm reduction and child welfare systems.
- 18** Explore existing resources on and best practices to address issues facing people who use drugs with intersecting marginalized identities, such as 2S-LGBTQIA+ people who use drugs.

2024 INITIATIVES

1 In collaboration with the OHT Mental Health and Addictions Steering Committee, explore implementation of universal screening for SUD in Brantford-Brant.

Many people who may benefit from treatment or other substance use-related support are in contact with healthcare and social service providers but may not be identified as in need of drug-related services. Routine, standardized screening of individuals for substance use-related needs can increase early identification and smooth referral pathways. In 2023, the Drugs Strategy conducted preliminary work to assess interest and readiness among service providers for implementation of universal screening for SUD. Initial responses were promising, so in 2024 we will undertake a more robust feasibility assessment. This will include the completion of a resource map to define care pathways, exploring what technology would be required, and potentially implementing a small-scale pilot.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- *Advocate for coordinated and timely treatment services.*

Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals.

- *Increase opportunities for coordinated planning with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues, including establishing clear pathways to medical and mental health supports for individuals who overdose.*

Goal 6: A community that works collaboratively.

- *Create cross-training and knowledge exchange opportunities across community service sector.*
- *Develop a standardized framework for working with individuals with addictions and mental health concerns.*

2 Scale up the availability of the PreVenture program.

PreVenture is an evidence-based prevention program that aims to promote mental health and delay substance use among youth. Woodview Mental Health & Autism Services scaled up the availability of the PreVenture program in the community during 2023, as well as streamlined **the registration process**. The Drugs Strategy also launched a PreVenture Working Group, to bring together Drugs Strategy partners and other allies to collaborate on raising awareness about the program and to increase enrollment. In 2024, the PreVenture Working Group aims to develop a collaborative strategy for promotion and referral to increase attendance.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.

- *Increase awareness and education about substance use and mental health for youth and their caregivers.*

Goal 8: A community that engages, supports, and empowers youth.

- *Encourage enhanced coordination between mental health and addiction services for youth.*

3 Launch a drug treatment court.

Drug treatment courts provide an alternative to incarceration for people charged with certain low-level drug-related criminal law violations. Individuals who meet the eligibility criteria are offered the opportunity to complete a drug treatment program in lieu of moving through the traditional court process. The Drug Treatment Court Working Group has developed a proposal for the treatment component of the program. However, pandemic-related backlogs in the criminal justice system prevented the working group from securing the support of a judge in 2023, which is needed before the project can move forward. The working group hopes that improved criminal justice system capacity will make it possible to move this project forward in 2024.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals.

- *Increase recovery-focused solutions for individuals involved in the criminal justice system.*
- *Increase opportunities for coordinated planning with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues.*

4 Reduce stigma against people who use drugs through sector-specific anti-stigma education.

Reducing stigma against people who use drugs was a priority for the Drugs Strategy in 2023 and will continue to be a priority in 2024. In 2023, BCHU, in collaboration with the Harm Reduction and Anti-Stigma Working Group, reviewed evidence for approaches to reducing stigma and conducted an environmental scan to identify relevant materials and resources. Based on their findings, the working group developed a plan for implementing comprehensive anti-stigma education tailored to the needs of different organizations and sectors. BCHU was selected as the pilot site for this anti-stigma education initiative targeted to all staff. The BCHU pilot was launched in November 2023 and is scheduled to be completed in early 2024. If success is demonstrated during the pilot, the initiative will be rolled out to 1-2 additional sectors in 2024.



Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.

- *Increase public awareness of harm reduction principles and its function in community safety.*
- *Increase public awareness of the realities of substance use, addiction, and stigma for the individual and families.*

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- *Increase training opportunities for frontline staff.*
- *Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.*

Goal 5: A community that values the dignity, expertise and spirit of all people.

- *Launch an anti-stigma campaign targeting community members, local institutions, and services.*

Goal 7: A community that wants to learn more.

- *Offer education opportunities for community members and organizations to learn about harm reduction and stigma around drug use.*

5 Expand support for families of people who use drugs.

While some supports currently exist for the families of people who use drugs in Brantford-Brant, there is a need to raise awareness of these resources and make them easier to access. The Drugs Strategy will develop a “one stop shop” website where existing resources can be brought together and made comprehensively available to community members. Any gaps will be noted for consideration as part of the Drugs Strategy’s 2025 planning process.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.

- *Increase awareness and education about substance use and mental health for youth and their caregivers.*
- *Increase public awareness of the realities of substance use, addiction and stigma for the individual and families.*

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- *Focus on client-centered service, including increasing supports for individuals with specialized needs, including for those involved in sex work, pregnant women, LGBTQ2S individuals, older adults and family members of those living with addiction.*

Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals.

- *Increase supports for families who have been affected by addiction.*

6 Open a CTS site in Brantford.

In 2023, work towards opening a CTS site continued, led by GRCHC with support from a CTS Working Group. CTS sites are places where people can use pre-obtained drugs indoors in a safe, clean facility, and overdoses can be reversed by professional healthcare providers. At these sites, people who use drugs can access other services like primary care, mental health services, housing support and drug treatment. The group's focus in 2023 was on communications and public education, including the launch of an updated website and the development of other communications materials such as handouts and an educational video. The CTS Working Group also presented to a variety of stakeholder groups to update them on the CTS work and answer questions. In addition, GRCHC conducted preliminary work on the needed applications and operational plan, while exploring potential locations for the site.

In October 2023, the Ministry of Health announced that they have paused applications for new CTS sites to allow for updates to the application process. Consequently, as of the time of this Action Plan's publication, the CTS Working Group has paused actively exploring potential locations. The working group, led by GRCHC, will continue public education work and other planning in 2024 while waiting for applications to reopen. Once applications are reopened, the working group will restart its work to identify an appropriate site. Once GRCHC identifies a site to propose to the community, there will be an extensive public engagement process.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.

- *Increase access to medically supervised mental health and addictions programming.*

Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals.

- *Increase opportunities for coordinated planning with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues.*

Goal 4: A community that prioritizes the health and safety of its residents.

- *Implement supervised consumption services.*

7 Build relationships between the Drugs Strategy and Indigenous-led organizations in Brantford-Brant and explore ways to improve the quality of services in the community for Indigenous people who use drugs.

The Drugs Strategy understands that Indigenous people who use drugs face particular challenges when attempting to access appropriate services and supports. In 2024 we will prioritize building relationships with Indigenous-led organizations in Brantford-Brant, along with Six Nations Mental Health and Addictions Services and Indigenous people who use drugs themselves. The goal of this relationship-building is to lay the groundwork for future efforts to improve the quality of services in the community for Indigenous people who use drugs.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- *Focus on client centered service, including increasing availability of treatment options and supports that are specific to populations and individuals with specialized needs, including Indigenous people.*
- *Promote community education and awareness of trauma-informed care, including education about the intergenerational impacts of trauma, substance use and colonialism.*
- *Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.*

Goal 5: A community that values the dignity, expertise and spirit of all people.

- *Expand Indigenous-led, culturally appropriate programming and care.*

8 In partnership with the OHT Mental Health and Addictions Integration Lead, convene a working group to identify inefficiencies and gaps in current withdrawal management clinical pathways, and make recommendations for improvement.

Withdrawal management is a crucial component of the continuum of care for people seeking support for an SUD. In 2024, the Drugs Strategy will work with the OHT Mental Health and Addictions Integration Lead with the goal of identifying ways to optimize withdrawal management services in Brantford-Brant. This will include convening a working group to research best practices for withdrawal management stepped care models and identifying needed improvements. Recommendations will be made to the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee for consideration as part of 2025 planning.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- *Advocate for coordinated and timely treatment services.*
- *Increase access to medically supervised mental health and addictions programming.*

Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals.

- *Increase opportunities for coordinated planning with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues, including establishing clear pathways to medical and mental health supports for individuals who overdose.*

Goal 6: A community that works collaboratively.

- *Develop a standardized framework for working with individuals with addiction and mental health concerns.*

9 Launch a Peer Support Community of Practice for Brantford-Brant.

Peer support workers are people who work in social service positions and share lived or living experiences with the communities they serve. A growing evidence base supports the benefits of integrating peer support workers into all parts of the substance use continuum of care. Multiple organizations in Brantford-Brant employ peers, and the Drugs Strategy (including peer support workers from member organizations) has identified a need for increased support and community-building among these vital workers. Building on the Drugs Strategy's successful Harm Reduction Community of Practice, in 2024 we will launch a Peer Support Community of Practice for Brantford-Brant.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- *Ensure the work of addictions and mental health practitioners is valued and best practices are followed.*
- *Increase training opportunities for front line staff.*
- *Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience, including expand or enhance current peer support programs; and support the development of a peer support network.*

Goal 6: A community that works collaboratively.

- *Create cross-training and knowledge exchange opportunities across community service sector.*

10 Assess support needs of businesses and service providers located in downtown Brantford to reduce the harms of drug use in their establishments and surrounding areas.

Businesses, service providers, and other establishments located in downtown Brantford report challenges associated with drug use on their properties and in surrounding areas, including overdoses in their bathrooms. Drugs Strategy partners will engage key stakeholders in downtown Brantford to assess the scope of overdoses in commercial and social services premises, ensure clear pathways for naloxone access, and identify other areas of need. If 2024 capacity allows us to take steps to address identified needs, we will aim to do so; if not, we will consider identified needs as part of the planning process for 2025.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.

- *Increase public awareness of overdose prevention, especially around fentanyl and other opioids, including the use of naloxone; harm reduction principles and its function in community safety; and the realities of substance use, addiction and stigma for the individual and families.*

Goal 5: A community that values the dignity, expertise and spirit of all people.

- *Launch an anti-stigma campaign targeting community members, local institutions, and services.*

Goal 7: A community that wants to learn more.

- *Offer education opportunities for community members and organizations to learn about harm reduction and stigma around drug use.*

11 Support the evaluation and scale-up of Brantford-Brant's safer supply pilot.

Safer supply refers to providing prescribed medications as a safer alternative to the toxic illegal drug supply to people who are at high risk of overdose. Safer supply can help prevent overdoses, save lives, and connect people who use drugs to other health and social services. GRCHC's safer supply pilot launched in October of 2022, and a priority for the Drugs Strategy in 2023 was a rigorous evaluation of the program, along with the identification of opportunities to scale up. In the fall of 2023, GRCHC applied for funding to support a scale-up, with a focus on increasing tailored services for Indigenous clients and expanding access to safer supply in the County of Brant. If applications for additional funding are successful, the Drugs Strategy will support the scale-up, including ensuring effective collaboration with Indigenous-led organizations and County of Brant partners. The Drugs Strategy will also continue to support the evaluation of the pilot, which is scheduled for completion in March 2024.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- *Increase availability of population-specific treatment options.*
- *Increase access to medically supervised mental health and addictions programming.*
- *Improve access to services for individuals living in rural communities.*

Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals.

- *Increase opportunities for coordinated planning with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues.*

12 Expand access to drug checking services

The unpredictability of the illicit drug supply is a major driver of high rates of overdose. Drug checking refers to technologies that allow individuals to learn more about the composition of the drugs that they purchase, allowing them to make more informed choices about the use of these substances. TAN, SLCS, the Brantford Public Library, and BCHU completed a 7-month pilot of fentanyl test strip distribution in 2023. In 2024, we will build on this work by exploring the possibility of developing an ongoing program for fentanyl test strip distribution (if supported by the evaluation results). We will also implement a pilot of xylazine test strip distribution. Xylazine is a non-opioid tranquilizer that has been found as a contaminate in the illicit opioid supply and is associated with unusually heavy sedation and atypical skin and soft tissue infections. We will also explore the feasibility of offering more comprehensive drug checking services in Brantford-Brant, through research on best practices and learning calls with other jurisdictions.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.
- Focus on client-centered service.

Goal 4: A community that prioritizes the health and safety of its residents.

- Expand harm reduction outreach services.

Goal 7: A community that wants to learn more.

- Improve local monitoring and data collection regarding substance use, particularly on opioid usage and overdose.

13 Expand awareness of and access to naloxone among seniors.

The Drugs Strategy is concerned that seniors are falling through the cracks when it comes to substance use-related services and education. A recent report from the National Institute on Aging at Toronto Metropolitan University calls for intentional efforts to increase awareness and understanding of opioid use disorder (OUD) among older Canadians. It highlights research suggesting that older people living with OUD may experience more stigma than younger people when accessing harm reduction supports, including naloxone, and that they also tend to be less educated about overdose response than their younger counterparts. In 2024, the Drugs Strategy will work to expand awareness of and access to naloxone among seniors in Brantford-Brant through tailored naloxone trainings delivered as part of seniors-specific programming, in partnership with seniors-serving organizations in the community.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.

- Increase public awareness of overdose prevention, especially around fentanyl and other opioids, including the use of naloxone.

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- Focus on client centered service, including increasing availability of treatment options and supports that are specific to populations and individuals with specialized needs, including older adults.

Goal 4: A community that prioritizes the health and safety of its residents.

- Broaden access to medications that can reverse the effects of opioids (e.g. naloxone).

14 Expand access to harm reduction supplies in the County of Brant.

While harm reduction supply access has expanded significantly in Brantford over the past several years, those who live in the County of Brant still have limited options when it comes to accessing these supplies. In 2024, the Drugs Strategy will work to expand access to both harm reduction supplies and naloxone in the County of Brant.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.

- Improve engagement with rural community.

Goal 4: A community that prioritizes the health and safety of its residents.

- Expand the Needle Exchange Program (NEP).

15 Formalize pathways for collaboration between the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee and the OHT Mental Health & Addictions Steering Committee.

The OHT Mental Health and Addictions Steering Committee and the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee have been in ongoing communication since the Drugs Strategy was relaunched at the start of 2023. The Drugs Strategy Coordinator and OHT Mental Health and Addictions Integration Lead have ensured that their respective work has been synergistic and not duplicative. Both groups recognize the benefit of formalizing these pathways for collaboration, to ensure that they are clear, consistent, effective, and sustainable.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 6: A community that works collaboratively.

- Develop a mechanism for ongoing implementation and evaluation of the Drugs Strategy.
- Develop a standardized framework for working with individuals with addictions and mental health concerns.

16 Develop a formal process for ensuring that future years' Action Plans are developed with input from people who use drugs and people with lived experience of drug use.

The Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee recognizes that people who use drugs and people with lived experience of drug use have invaluable expertise on how to address drug-related harms most effectively. While the Drugs Strategy has always welcomed input from these groups (through the Core Coordinating Committee member BSUN, the participation of peer support workers in the Harm Reduction Community of Practice, and ad hoc feedback from clients and collaborators of Drugs Strategy member organizations), we recognize a need to develop processes to ensure that we are regularly incorporating input from this community into our annual planning process. In 2024 we will focus on exploring potential models, with the goal of implementing our own process no later than August 2025.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.

Goal 5: A community that values the dignity, expertise and spirit of all people.

- Position people with lived experience central in decision making.

17 Expand access to low barrier pregnancy and reproductive health care among pregnant people with lived or living experience of drug use by supporting the integration of an expanded midwifery care model into Brantford-Brant's treatment, harm reduction and child welfare systems.

Many pregnant people with lived or living experience of drug use have difficulty accessing non-stigmatizing and supportive perinatal healthcare. GRCHC secured funding in late 2023 to support the integration of an expanded midwifery care model into their services, with one of the areas of focus being pre- and postnatal care for people who use substances. The Drugs Strategy will support the onboarding of GRCHC's new midwife to ensure that this role is effectively integrated into Brantford-Brant's treatment, harm reduction and child welfare systems, and that referral pathways into the service are efficient and effective.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- Focus on client-centered service, including increase availability of population-specific treatment options; and increase supports for individuals with specialized needs, including for those involved in sex work, pregnant women, LGBTQ2S individuals, older adults and family members of those living with addiction.
- Increase access to medically supervised mental health and addictions programming.

18 Explore existing resources on and best practices to address issues facing people who use drugs with intersecting marginalized identities, such as 2S-LGBTQIA+ people who use drugs.

The Drugs Strategy recognizes that individuals who use drugs and who also have intersecting marginalized identities face unique challenges and require a tailored approach to service delivery to effectively meet their needs. In 2024, the Drugs Strategy will compile a library of existing resources and materials on this topic, complete an environmental scan of best practices, and present findings for consideration as part of planning for 2025.

Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):

Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.

- Focus on client-centered service, including increase availability of population-specific treatment options; and increase supports for individuals with specialized needs, including for those involved in sex work, pregnant women, and LGBTQ2S individuals.