



Windsor-Essex County Health Unit Board of Health

INFORMATION REPORT

Prepared By: Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention Department
Date: September 21, 2023
Subject: Windsor-Essex Community Opioid and Substance Use Strategy Update

BACKGROUND

The Windsor-Essex Community Opioid and Substance Strategy (WECOSS) was established in 2018 by the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) to bring together leadership representatives from across the region to address increasing rates of opioid use and overdose. The WECOSS is a four-pillar approach that leverages the knowledge and resources of more than 40 agencies and individuals with lived experience to address the harms of substance use at the community level through Prevention and Education, Harm Reduction, Treatment and Recovery, and Enforcement and Justice interventions.

Since the Strategy began, an Annual Report has been released as part of the WECOSS' commitment to information sharing. The purpose of each Annual Report is to highlight the work being done to address substance use in the community through the collaborative efforts of our WECOSS partners. In 2021, an evaluation of the WECOSS was conducted by engaging members and the public to assess the level of awareness and early impact of the WECOSS in the community. The findings from this evaluation were used to form recommendations as presented in the [WECOSS Modernization \(2021\)](#) to guide the pathway forward for the WECOSS, including highlighting priority areas, and emphasizing a collective impact approach.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Each of the four WECOSS pillars develops and implements at least one project per year, which are outlined in [Annual Reports](#). In 2022, the development of these projects were guided by the six priority areas for focus and action. Future initiatives will continue to address and expand upon these priorities as the Strategy evolves.

The *Addressing Substance Use in Corrections Reintegration Supports* project was a key initiative undertaken in 2022 by the Enforcement and Justice Working Group. This involved collaborating with the South West Detention Centre, Windsor Probation and Parole, and the Canadian Mental Health Association Windsor-Essex County Branch. The goal of the project was to improve access to substance use and harm reduction supports and services for justice-involved individuals who had a history of problematic substance use.

Through this project, 179 individuals were engaged, 138 of which were justice-involved individuals and 41 of which were justice system staff. This highlighted that justice-involved individuals released from custody required more knowledge and information in six (6) key areas:

- Housing support;
- Job skills or help getting a job;
- Community support groups;
- Help with obtaining identification;
- Referral to mental health and substance use services;
- Referral to withdrawal management or treatment for substance use

Additionally, justice-involved individuals expressed that their preferred methods for obtaining this information included one-on-one discussions with staff at intake, appointments, or during education sessions.

FUTURE PLANS

The findings from *Addressing Substance Use in Corrections Reintegration Supports* project resulted in the development of a wallet card resource containing information on more than 35 relevant supports and services. These will be distributed by various partners involved in the project and other relevant law enforcement partners to people involved with the justice system. There is also opportunity to work with partners to develop the necessary policies and procedures to facilitate discussions about relevant supports for successful reintegration. To support the educational needs of justice system staff, a hub of resources and educational materials was also compiled and will be made available through the WECOSS website.

Substance use supports and harm reduction approaches are critical for justice-involved individuals, especially during release from custody as this is when individuals are at an increased risk for drug-related deaths.¹ Additionally, addressing the basic needs of justice-involved individuals who use substances can aid in successful reintegration following incarceration.²

Subsequent work will focus on addressing barriers and building trust with people who use substances to enhance coordination between law enforcement and health services. To facilitate this, an online inventory of more than 200 local substance use, addictions, and mental health services will be designed through an ongoing WECOSS Treatment and Recovery Pillar Working Group project. The inventory will assist service providers in making referrals to relevant services for their clients.

References

1. Cooper, J. A., Onyeka, I., Cardwell, C., Paterson, E., Kirk, R., O'Reilly, D., & Donnelly, M. (2023). Record linkage studies of drug-related deaths among adults who were released from prison to the community: A scoping review. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1), 826. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15673-0>
2. McKiernan, A. (2017). Supporting reintegration in corrections by addressing problematic substance use: An environmental scan. *Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/CCSA-Reintegration-Corrections-Problematic-Substance-Use-Environmental-Scan-2017-en.pdf>