

Drug Poisoning Awareness Day, or International Overdose Awareness Day, is observed annually on August 31st as a day of remembrance for those who have died from preventable drug poisonings (overdoses).



Canada continues to experience unrelenting rates of drug poisonings and drug poisoning deaths, largely due to the toxic drug supply. In Waterloo Region over 817 people have died from suspected drug poisoning since 2018.

This year on Drug Poisoning Awareness Day the Waterloo Region Integrated Drugs Strategy re-affirms three truths that must be upheld in the work to end the drug poisoning crisis:

### **Policy solutions are needed to end the drug poisoning crisis.**

The current drug poisoning crisis has been fueled by racist and colonial drug policies that have criminalized people who use drugs. A criminal justice approach to substance use has not only failed, but has caused widespread harm to people and communities at large. We must move away from policies that criminalize people who use drugs and towards evidence-based drug policy grounded in a health, social and human rights approach to substance use informed by the expertise of the people most affected.

### **Harm reduction is healthcare.**

Harm reduction is a person-centered, evidence-based approach to supporting people who use drugs. Approaching substance use from a harm reduction lens allows people who use drugs the autonomy to make healthcare decisions based on their personal goals. The evidence base for harm reduction is robust and harm reduction must be upheld as a cornerstone of a comprehensive health approach to substance use.

### **Harm reduction supports must receive on-going and increased funding.**

Harm reduction is life affirming healthcare that keeps people who use drugs alive yet it faces on-going challenges to sustainable funding. On International Overdose Awareness Day we call for all governments to prioritize equitable access to healthcare for people who use drugs by ensuring that harm reduction services are suitably funded to operate in line with expanded community need.