

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 3, 2015

Prescription for Life: Reducing Opioid Overdose Deaths in Ontario

The Municipal Drug Strategy Co-ordinator's Network of Ontario is pleased to release the guidance document "Prescription For Life" to assist those with a critical role in opioid overdose prevention and intervention. The document is now available at www.drugstrategy.ca

Prescription opioid overdose deaths in Ontario have been increasing at record-setting levels for 13 years, with more than 5,000 deaths since 2000. In 2013, there were 625 opioid-related deaths or one death every 14 hours. The vast majority of deaths are accidental. Those at risk include people using opioids as prescribed or non-medically. An opioid overdose victim cannot save themselves.

Prescription for Life provides key actions urgently needed to improve opioid safety and reduce accidental opioid overdose fatalities and injuries by expanding access to the emergency medicine naloxone. Naloxone is a post patent, World Health Organization recommended Essential Medicine that (temporarily) reverses an opioid overdose. Like epinephrine (e.g. EpiPen®, Allerject™), it is a proven lifesaver during a medical emergency.

The evidence-based recommendations in Prescription For Life provide important steps for governments, regulators, professional associations, medical and non-medical providers and others in making Ontario safer and healthier. Considered as an essential part of the First Aid toolbox, expanded low-barrier naloxone access for those at risk and for potential witnesses (e.g. concerned parent) will reduce injuries, save lives - and begin to provide similar levels of care that are dedicated to reducing other preventable deaths such as motor vehicle collisions and infectious diseases.

Members of the Municipal Drug Strategy Co-ordinator's Network of Ontario (MDSCNO) work in more than 155 municipalities, counties, townships and First Nations communities across the province. These multi-sectoral initiatives aim to reduce the harms of alcohol and other drugs, including prescription medications based on the integrated components of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement/justice.

For more information visit www.drugstrategy.ca or contact:

Michael Parkinson, MDSCNO
519-504-8758

Kerri Kightley, MDSCNO
705-768-5887

Key Points

Canada leads all nations in opioid consumption and Ontario is a leading province in opioid prescribing and high dose dispensing. Sales of prescription opioids in Ontario total approximately \$123 million in 2012. Like alcohol, the availability of a substance is linked to risk of harms.

Use 'person-first' language. Describing people at-risk as 'addicts' or 'abusers' is popular but not accurate.

An Opioid/Opiate Overdose is a Medical Emergency.

Seconds matter. A victim cannot save themselves.

Witnesses to the overdose are the very first responders.

- Opioids include prescription painkillers such as oxycodone, hydromorphone, fentanyl, methadone, codeine etc. Opiates include heroin, morphine etc.
- The dose makes the poison- high dose prescription opioids have a higher risk of overdose.



Those at risk of an opioid overdose include people using as prescribed or non-medically. A person does not have to be addicted to opioids to overdose- or engaging in 'substance abuse'. Opioid overdoses have claimed lives across the socio-economic spectrum.

Naloxone is:

- An opioid antagonist- a (temporary) antidote for an opioid-related overdose;
- Cheap (approximately \$12/dose);
- Safe, with few contraindications;
- A proven lifesaver.
- Analogous to EpiPen for anaphylaxis
- Much more available in the U.S.A. and B.C.



Naloxone is a World Health Organization-recommended Essential Medicine:

The "safest, most efficacious and cost-effective medicine for priority conditions"

Opioid overdose deaths in Ontario have increased 463% (2000-2013) and are estimated to be the third leading cause of accidental death.

