

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Solutions to End the Drug Poisoning Crisis in Ontario: Choosing a New Direction**

[May 5, 2022] - [Ontario, Canada] - In Ontario through the pandemic, more residents than ever turned to drug use to cope with anxiety, isolation, and fear - often using, overdosing and dying alone. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the drug poisoning situation has escalated. A recent study on Ontario showed that between February and December 2020, there was a 79% increase in the number of opioid-related deaths across Ontario from 139 to 249. Since then, in the first half of 2021, rates of fatal drug poisonings more than doubled in 15 of 34 public health units across the province, with an increase in opioid-related deaths per 100,000 across all health units in Ontario from 7.9 to 14. More than 14,000 Ontarians have lost their lives to drug poisoning in the last five years - almost all preventable deaths.

Many communities are doing everything they can to confront this crisis themselves. Although residents, organizations, and Municipal governments in 41 local communities are coming together to tackle the crisis, they do not have the authority and resources required to address the underlying causes of this crisis. Through the Drug Strategy Network of Ontario (DSNO), many individuals from these communities feel that four key policy solutions are needed to keep people from dying:

1. Declaring the province's drug poisoning crisis to be an emergency under the emergency management and civil protection act (EMCPA, RSO 1990) & creating a provincial task force to address the crisis.
2. Expanding evidence-informed harm reduction and treatment practices throughout Ontario.
3. Eliminating the structural stigma that discriminates against people who use drugs.
4. Increasing investments in prevention and early intervention services that provide foundational support for the health, safety and well-being of individuals, families, and neighbourhoods.

The upcoming provincial election is an opportunity for community politicians to share their party's proposed response to the drug poisoning crisis. Whatever party is elected on June 2nd, the need to take action to prevent ongoing drug poisonings is now greater than ever. The proposed solutions, endorsed by DSNO members in the publication *Solutions to End the Drug Poisoning Crisis in Ontario: Choosing a New Direction*, can help to guide this action.

"Social determinants of health like income, housing, and employment play key roles in determining the impact of substance use on individual and community health," said Adrienne

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2008

Drug Strategy Network of Ontario

Crowder, Coordinator of the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy and DSNO member. “If we turn the attention of our public policy and legal systems towards the social determinants of health, more lives could be spared, and more money saved.”

Taking a new and bold approach to the drug poisoning crisis in Ontario is a crucial element of Ontario’s COVID-19 economic recovery. The DSNO wants to be part of this solution - avoiding silos and coming together to build a common agenda for change. The DSNO wants to work with the Province and others to pilot innovative social and economic solutions to the crisis.

More about *Solutions to End the Drug Poisoning Crisis in Ontario: Choosing a New Direction* can be found here, including ways to show your support and a PDF of the policy solutions document: <https://www.drugstrategy.ca/drug-poisoning-policy-solutions.html>

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About the Drug Strategy Network of Ontario (DSNO)

The DSNO was established in 2008 and its members live and work in more than 160 urban, northern, rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Ontario, representing a combined population of more than seven-million people. With a wide range of substance use related expertise, the network coordinates more than forty local, cross-sectorial, community, municipal or regional-based drug strategies.

The DSNO and local Ontario drug strategies are based on a four pillar, evidence-informed model for reducing the harms associated with substance use: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety.

The DSNO aims to reduce the harms of substances in Ontario. It is a place for collaboration and knowledge sharing, and for developing evidence-informed strategies that lend support to provincial, regional, and local community initiatives.

The DSNO also provides space for peer-to-peer connection, support, and collaboration, with a focus on strengthening and sustaining local drug strategy operations, including governance, communications, human resources, and fundraising.

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