

Naloxone Distribution

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Access to Naloxone and Naloxone education for clients and community partners is a priority for Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health (WDGPH);
- Drug poisonings and deaths related to opioids continue to rise in the Wellington, Dufferin, Guelph (WDG) region as well as Ontario more broadly;
- Promoting awareness of harm reduction and addiction issues in the WDGPH region helps to decrease stigma and promotes health for all.

Background

The Ontario Naloxone Program (ONP) is designed to promote community awareness of drug poisonings, to educate the community in the use of Naloxone and to distribute Naloxone kits to community partners and clients.¹

Since 2017, the ONP has been part of the WDGPH harm reduction program. Harm reduction is an evidence-based approach to promote health equity and wellness in relation to substance

use.² The WDGPH harm reduction program is based on this philosophy and its accompanying set of strategies that focus on preventing harms and improving the health of people who use substances. The harm reduction approach ensures that we are working towards promoting health for all regardless of their substance use.

Discussion

Naloxone is a safe medication which temporarily reverses the actions of opioids when drug poisoning has occurred as a result of an opioid. Naloxone can easily be administered nasally or by an injection.³

The administration of Naloxone is a part of a larger harm reduction strategy. Naloxone does not treat addiction or stop the use of a substance, but it does temporarily reduce the immediate dangers associated with an opioid drug poisoning, specifically accidental death. The ONP provides WDGPH with both injectable and nasal spray Naloxone kits which WDGPH in turn supplies community agencies to distribute into the community or directly to clients who attend a WDGPH office.

The table below displays the number of Naloxone kits distributed across the WDG region over the last four years. Although it appears that there was less Naloxone distributed in 2023, WDGPH implemented more accurate methods for monitoring distribution of Naloxone to the community partners which accounts for this decrease.

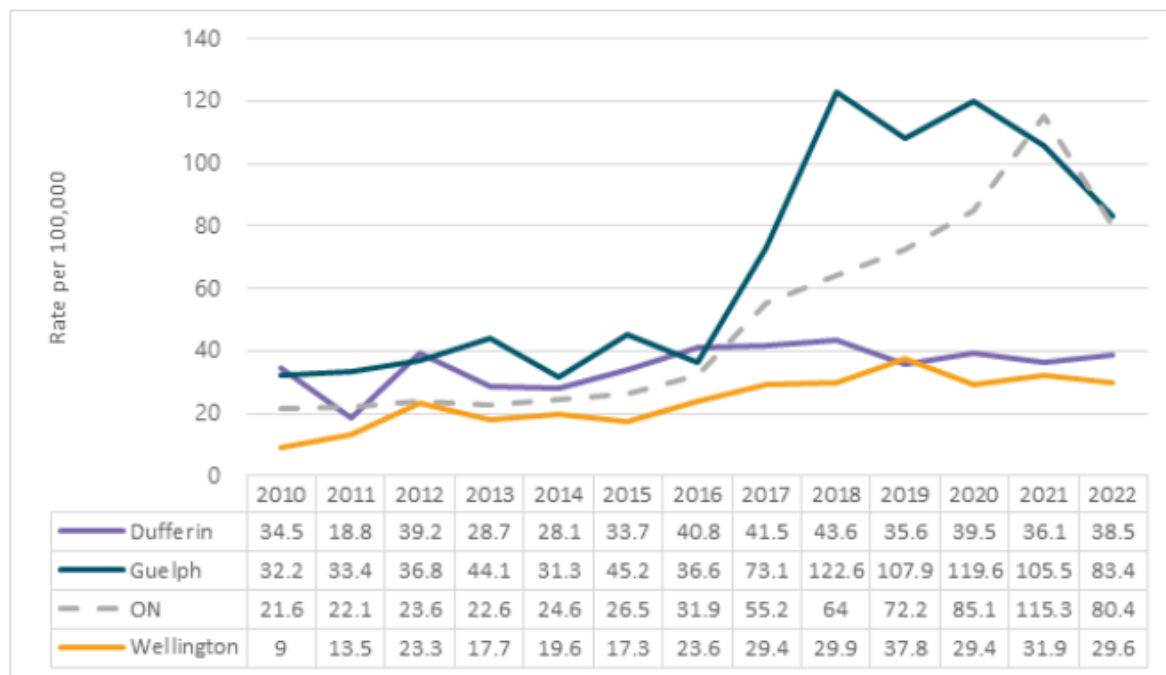
Year	Naloxone Kit Totals
2020	2933
2021	2924
2022	3599
2023	3087

WDGPH connects with individuals and community agencies to ensure that anyone requesting Naloxone understands how to safely administer Naloxone and respond to the critical situation. In 2023 alone, over 300 individuals in the WDG region were educated by WDGPH staff on the safe administration of Naloxone.

Although the WDGPH continues educate, train, and promote Naloxone use in the region, the number of drug poisoning and drug poisoning deaths continues to increase. WDGPH is working with other community partners to address this issue.

The graph below shows emergency room visits related to opioids across the WDG region from 2008 compared to Ontario. The sharp rise in 2016 indicates the introduction of Fentanyl into the drug supply in the WDG region and following gradual decline is related to various ongoing harm reduction efforts to reduce these emergency room visits. The counties of Wellington and Dufferin are well below the provincial average and the city of Guelph is on par.

Figure # - Rate of Emergency Department Visits for Opioid Poisoning per 100,000 Residents in Wellington County (not including Guelph), Dufferin County, the City of Guelph, and Ontario, 2010-2022



Data source - National Ambulatory Care Reporting System (NACRS). 2010-2022, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, IntelliHEALTH Ontario; accessed March 05, 2023.

Population Estimates - Statistics Canada. 2016. Annual population estimates by age and sex, July 1, 2001 to 2022. Census of Canada (database). Community Data Program (distributor). Last updated January 23, 2023. Communitydata.ca (accessed Feb 01, 2023).

As stated previously, Naloxone is one piece of a larger harm reduction strategy that WDGPH participates in with WDGPH's community partners. The various partners include, but are not limited to, community health centers, HIV/AIDS organizations, community outreach organizations, youth hubs, shelters, emergency rooms and first responders. In collaboration with these

organizations, the WDGPH harm reduction program educates and supports the community on prevention of substance use, safer substance use, substance checking, substance poisoning prevention and reversal and treatment options.

Treatment options for people who are interested in reducing or abstaining from substance use exist in WDG region. However, often a prerequisite to treatment programs is withdrawal from substances and supervised inpatient withdrawal management programs are limited in the region. In addition to the limited access to inpatient supervised withdrawal management programs locally, many of the treatment programs have long waiting lists, require additional insurance or funds to access or do not provide treatment for the addiction the individual presents with. Naloxone and other harm reduction strategies are a key component to supporting individuals who are seeking treatment.

Stigma directed towards individuals who use substances is a major concern and often prevents these individuals from seeking harm reduction services or treatment services. Stigma is a deeply held set of false beliefs about a group of people with at least one attribute in common.³ Stigma allows for the judgement and discrimination of this group of people and can be demonstrated by either overt actions or by silent compliance with those actions.³

The WDGPH harm reduction program is working with community partners to reduce the stigma associated with substance use. The common harms that individuals who use substances face include criminalization, barriers to clean injection and inhalation supplies, and lack of safe substance supply.

Health Equity Implications

Health equity is created when individuals have a fair opportunity to reach their fullest health potential.⁴ Improving health equity requires that communities focus on individuals who are experiencing significant health and healthcare access challenges.⁴

The WDGPH harm reduction program promotes education, prevention, barrier-free access to harm reduction supplies and self-directed access to treatment. WDGPH provides barrier-free access to harm reduction supplies and Naloxone throughout the WDG region. All WDGPH offices have self-help harm reduction cupboards, stocked with various harm reduction supplies which clients can access during working hours. Clients or family members of individuals who use substances, who require Naloxone, are provided with either a nasal or injectable Naloxone kit at reception. WDGPH does not include Naloxone in the self-help cupboards to ensure that all clients are appropriately educated on its use.

Conclusion

WDGPH will continue to advance Naloxone education and Naloxone use with the Agency's clients and community partners. The use of Naloxone is a safe and simple approach to reducing drug poisonings and deaths throughout the WDG community and increases awareness of the role of harm reduction.

Naloxone is only one of many harm reduction strategies being implemented by the WDGPH and its community partners to tackle the harms associated with substance use. To address the impacts of problematic substance use, a sustained, multifaceted approach, beginning with the acknowledgement of widespread stigma towards individuals who use substances in the community is necessary.

The WDGPH harm reduction program will continue to work with community partners to reduce stigma towards individuals who use substances and promote health equity for all residents of the WDG region.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- Population Health Assessment
- Health Equity
- Effective Public Health Practice
- Emergency Management

Program Standards

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- Food Safety
- Healthy Environments
- Healthy Growth and Development
- Immunization
- Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- Safe Water
- School Health
- Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- Improve health outcomes
- Focus on children's health
- Build strong partnerships
- Innovate our programs and services
- Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

References

1. Public Health Ontario [Internet]. [Cited 2024 March 19] Available from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-take-home-naloxone-programs>
2. Canada [Internet]. [Cited 2024 March 19] Available from: https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/naloxone.html?utm_campaign=hc-sc-opioids-stigma-reduction-23-24&utm_medium=sem&utm_source=ggl&utm_content=ad-text-en&utm_term=what%20is%20naloxone&adv=2324-457951&id_campaign=20497754863&id_source=153355302472&id_content=671268171306&gad_source=1&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI5oefqPyAhQMVxuoWBR0g-ghLEAAYASAAEgKtEvD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds#1
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