

TO: Chair and members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. **Receive this report for information.**

Key Points

- This report outlines the rationale for developing a local early warning system for opioid-related harms, and progress to date.
- Development of an early warning system is a required component of Ontario's Harm Reduction Program Enhancement.
- An early warning system is intended to provide timely and useful information about opioid use in the community and facilitate a community response. It links changes in opioid use patterns to discrete actions for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) and/or partners.
- WDGPH has developed an Overdose and Drug Use Information System (ODIS), which brings together data from multiple sources and enables situational awareness.
- WDGPH has been meeting with community partners to identify additional sources of opioid-related information, how the information will be shared, and how the information will inform the community's response.

Discussion

Background

In June of 2017, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announced that it would provide local public health units with additional funding to increase their capacity for harm reduction services. This funding, provided as the 'Harm Reduction Program Enhancement,' includes three components:

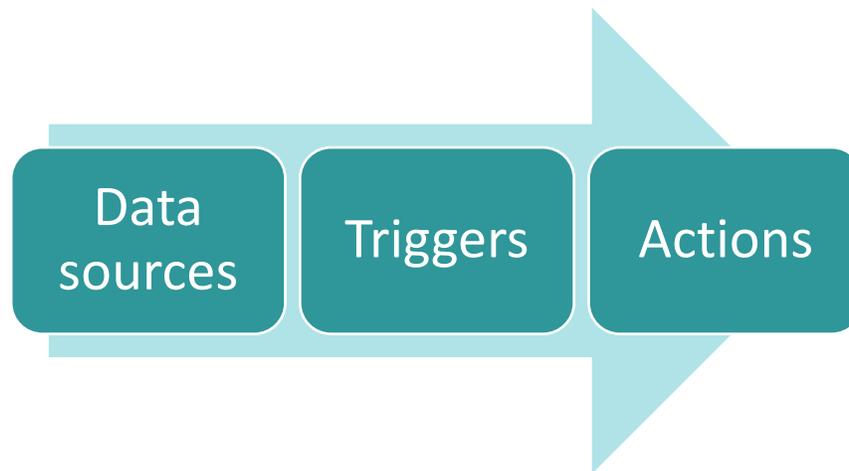
- Local Opioid Response – public health units are expected to implement, maintain and/or expand local opioid-related programming based on an assessment of local need;
- Naloxone Distribution and Training – public health units are expected to work with local partners to provide naloxone kits and training to priority populations; and
- Opioid Overdose Early Warning and Surveillance – public health units are expected to implement and/or enhance an early warning system to identify and respond to changes in local opioid activity.¹

These components align with work already being done by the WDGPH Opioid Working Group, which was formed in February 2017 to develop a coordinated public health approach to local opioid use. The objectives and priorities of the Opioid Working Group were outlined in a Board of Health report submitted in September 2017 (BH.01.SEP0617.R24).

The provincial framework for local opioid early warning systems was communicated to local public health units in February 2018 by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health.² Local public health units are directed to:

- Identify **data sources** that provide useful and timely information about opioid use in the community. Relevant data may be quantitative (e.g. number of emergency department visits for opioid overdose) or qualitative (e.g. reports of contaminated drugs from people who use opioids).
- Identify **triggers** that would indicate an increase in local opioid activity. Triggers may include changes in existing indicators (e.g. increases in emergency department visits) or new sources of relevant information (e.g. increased reports of overdoses).
- Plan **actions** that could be undertaken to reduce opioid-related harms following a trigger. Actions may include steps taken by WDGPH (e.g. communication, changes to naloxone distribution) and/or community partners (e.g. first responders, law enforcement).

Figure 1: Opioid Overdose Early Warning System Framework²



Data Sources for Opioid Early Warning Systems

WDGPH has developed an ODIS, which was presented at the March 2018 Board of Health meeting. ODIS brings together multiple data sources about opioid use to inform work being done by WDGPH and partners. Information about prescription opioid utilization and overdose-related emergency department visits are currently available, with additional data sources to be incorporated over time.

The WDGPH Opioid Working Group has been meeting with partners to identify additional data sources that would inform an early warning system. These include data from community service providers who work with people who use opioids (e.g. ARCH, Sanguen) and from services that respond to opioid-related harms (e.g. EMS, police). The Opioid Working Group has also identified early warning systems being used in neighbouring jurisdictions that could inform this work.

Next Steps

The WDGPH Opioid Working Group and its community partners are currently planning how opioid-related data will be collected, reported, and shared amongst the group. Once the data sources have been identified, next steps include:

- Determining appropriate triggers, based on the data sources, that indicate greater opioid-related harms in the community;
- Linking triggers to actions that will be taken by WDGPH and partners;
- Developing an integrated communication system that includes service providers, people who use opioids, and members of the public.

Conclusion

WDGPH and local partners are working together to develop a robust early warning system that will enable appropriate community action to address opioid-related harms.

Ontario Public Health Standard

Foundational Standards:

Healthy Equity

Goal: Public health practice results in decreased health inequities such that everyone has equal opportunities for optimal health and can attain their full health potential without disadvantage due to social position or other socially determined circumstances.

Effective Public Health Practice

Goal: Public health practice is transparent, responsive to current and emerging evidence, and emphasizes continuous quality improvement.

Population Health Assessment

Goal: Public Health practice responds effectively to current and evolving conditions, and contributes to the public's health and well-being with programs and services that are informed by the population's health status, including social determinants of health and health inequities.

Program Standards:

Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being

Goal: To reduce the burden of chronic diseases of public health importance and improve wellbeing.

Substance Use and Injury Prevention

Goal: To reduce the burden of preventable injuries and substance use.

Healthy Environments

Goal: To reduce exposure to health hazards and promote the development of healthy built and natural environments that support health and mitigate existing and emerging risks, including the impacts of a changing climate.

Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control

Goal: To reduce the burden of communicable diseases and other infectious diseases of public health importance.

WDGPH Strategic Direction(s)

Health Equity: We will provide programs and services that integrate health equity principles to reduce or eliminate health differences between population groups.

Organizational Capacity: We will improve our capacity to effectively deliver public health programs and services.

Service Centred Approach: We are committed to providing excellent service to anyone interacting with WDG Public Health.

☒ **Building Healthy Communities:** We will work with communities to support the health and well-being of everyone.

Health Equity

Health equity principles are being applied across all WDGPH opioid projects with the goal of reducing or eliminating differences in opioid-related harms between population groups. A robust early warning system would provide useful and timely information about the opioid-related harms experienced by marginalized groups, and enable interventions that would reduce harms.

Community engagement is a key approach to improving health equity through action on the social determinants of health.³ An early warning system includes people who use opioids as key stakeholders who provide relevant data and inform decisions about appropriate actions.

References

1. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Population and Public Health Division. Harm Reduction Program Enhancement: Questions and Answers. 2017 Sep [cited 2018 Mar 26]. Available from: <http://eenet.ca/sites/default/files/2018/January/Harm%20Reduction%20Program%20Enhancement%20FAQ%20September%202015%202017.pdf>
2. Williams D. PHO Grand Rounds: Opioid Early Warning Systems [slide deck]. 2018 Feb 13 [cited 2018 Mar 26]. Available from: <http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/LearningAndDevelopment/EventPresentations/PHO%20GR%20Feb132018.pdf>
3. National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. A Guide to Community Engagement Frameworks for Action on the Social Determinants of Health and Health Equity. Antigonish, NS: National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, St. Francis Xavier University; 2013.

Appendices

None.