

# Media Release



## **International Overdose Awareness Day August 26, 2021 - For immediate release**

August 31 is International Overdose Awareness Day. The goals of this day are to raise awareness of overdose, reduce the stigma of a drug-related death and spread the message that overdose death is preventable. It also acknowledges the grief felt by families and friends remembering the thousands of people who have died or had a permanent injury as a result of drug overdose.

An overdose means having more of a drug (or combination of drugs) than your body can cope with. Overdoses can be fatal or non-fatal and usually occur accidentally. To help in de-stigmatization, many have adopted the term poisoning or toxicity

Preliminary data in Timiskaming reports 51 suspected overdose cases having presented to hospital emergency rooms in 2020, with more overdoses not being reported, or being treated at home. At least 11 substance related deaths occurred in Timiskaming in 2020, and more than 2,387 across Ontario.

All drugs can cause an overdose, including alcohol and opioids. Accidental opioid-related overdose deaths have been a growing public health crisis. This crisis is driven by a combination of factors, including an increasingly toxic unregulated ('street') drug supply as well as barriers to access to harm reduction services and treatment.

Naloxone or Narcan is a lifesaving drug that can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose until the person can receive medical support. Free Naloxone kits are available at many locations in Timiskaming, including health unit offices and many local pharmacies. Timiskaming Health Unit (THU) strongly encourages anyone who uses or knows someone who uses opioids to pick up a free Naloxone kit. Having Naloxone on hand, not using alone, and calling 911 when an overdose occurs can all help prevent overdose deaths.

THU joins many partners and groups in encouraging everyone to learn more about mental health and addictions, and to think about how they talk about substances and people who use them. "Addiction can happen to anyone yet stigma is one of the biggest barriers for people who use drugs in accessing services and treatment. Whether from our upbringing or society, our attitudes and beliefs about substance use can either help or deter someone and their family from getting the help they need" says Kim Peters, Public Health Promoter with THU. Peters encourages people to contact the health unit or other community services such as Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about the signs and symptoms of overdose, where to access naloxone and addiction treatment services and for resources on how to end stigma.

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