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# Media Release



## **Recognizing those who go unseen: International Overdose Awareness Day August 21, 2023 - For immediate release**

Communities in Timiskaming are coming together to remember those who have died or suffered due to drug poisoning (overdose). Observed on the 31st of August every year, International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) is a day of remembrance for the people whose lives have been altered by overdose, and the unseen heroes who saved lives by caring and responding.

Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy (TDAS) and local partners take this chance to promote understanding of drug poisoning in our community. We seek to reduce the stigma of drug-related deaths and create change that reduces the harms associated with drug use.

This year on the Overdose Awareness Day, the Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy is putting a spotlight on three collaborative events.

- **Memorial Service** at the Timiskaming Memorial Site by the Toburn Mine Property in Kirkland Lake. August 31 at **3 p.m.** Change for Timiskaming is inviting you to take part in this year's memorial service. The event will have a short service, a free outdoor barbeque, live music, and naloxone kits available for distribution. Harm reduction information and resources will also be on site. This is a memorial held to provide prevention strategies for further deaths relating to poisonings and to honour the families and loved ones of the entire district who suffered the loss of loved ones. All communities across the district are welcome to take part. This event is brought to you by Pavilion Women's Centre, Salvation Army, Northeastern Recovery Centre, No More KL, Addiction Recovery Support Group Northern Ontario, Timiskaming Health Unit, Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy, and CMHA-CT.
- **Memorial Tree and Community Art Project** at the south end of the boardwalk by the volleyball courts in New Liskeard on August 31 from **10 a.m. - 12 p.m.** The art project led by Pavilion Women's Centre allows individuals and service providers an opportunity to remember loved ones. Information and resources, naloxone kits and training will be available on-site. The Pavilion is hosting this event, joined by Timiskaming Health Unit, Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy (TDAS), The Salvation Army, CMHA-CT, District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board, Timiskaming Emergency Medical Services, and Mino M'shki-ki Indigenous Health Team.
- **Sacred Fire** at Mino M'shki-ki Kirkland Lake location: 109 Burnside Drive. August 31 from **1 p.m. - 4 p.m.** A Sacred fire will be lit for community members in honour of the Overdose Awareness Day, to raise awareness of drug poisoning and to remember the people we have lost. Harm reduction supplies, refreshments, snacks, and cultural and western support will be available. This event is brought to the community by Mino M'shki-ki Indigenous Health Team and Keepers of the Circle.

Erin Cowan, Co-Chair of the Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy shared that "As we mark International Overdose Awareness Day in 2023, we honour the people whose lives have been

deeply impacted by overdose: communities, families, friends, healthcare workers, support services, and first responders.”

Drug poisonings claimed the lives of thousands of Ontarians in 2022, with a significantly higher overdose mortality rate seen in the north\*. The first six months of 2023 alone saw 6 suspected drug-related deaths in the Timiskaming Health Unit area+. The need for change and action is becoming ever-more critical.

“We encourage everyone to join us in raising awareness of drug overdose and stigma,” says Brian Pascoe, who has lived experiences with substance use and is a member of TDAS. “Start a conversation about overdose, share what you know, put on something purple on August 31, and head to a local IOAD event. The threat is real; we must put an end to the stigma surrounding drug use and addiction. We can make a difference and save lives, but this requires our joint effort.”

If you would like more information on the local events, please visit [www.tdas.ca](http://www.tdas.ca), or visit Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy Facebook page.

TDAS is a multi-sectoral initiative with members representing mental health and addictions treatment services, Indigenous services, community members including those with lived experience, social services, family health teams, hospitals, school boards, police, and public health. Our collective efforts aim to prevent and reduce the harms associated with substance use and improve the quality of life of all Timiskaming residents.

For more information please visit:

<https://www.tdas.ca/>

\*Represents the number of suspect drug-related deaths as determined from the investigating coroner’s preliminary notes and/or the preliminary findings from the autopsy.

+Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario. Monthly suspected drug-related deaths summary Table, Ontario. Data was released July 2023.

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