

Media Release



International Overdose Awareness Day August 31, 2020 - For immediate release

August 31st 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.

Join Timiskaming Health Unit (THU) and other community partners for a week of events in support of those who have been affected by overdose. Naloxone training and kits will be available through events from both THU and Pavilion Women's Centre (PWC). Naloxone is a life-saving medication that counters the effects of opioid overdose. PWC is also inviting people to visit designated trees across the district where they can tie a ribbon to reflect on the struggles that many individuals and loved ones experience because of substance use. In addition, the Temiskaming and Kirkland Lake OPP are promoting the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act, a law that provides some legal protection for people who seek emergency help during an overdose. A complete list of activities with more details can be found on THU's website.

THU encourages everyone to take time to learn more about mental health and addictions, and to think about how they talk about substances and people who use them. "Stigma is one of the biggest barriers for people with addictions 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 how to support someone with substance use issues, how to end stigma, and where naloxone training, harm reduction supplies, and addiction treatment is available.

The number of opioid overdoses in Ontario continues to rise. Preliminary data reveals that Timiskaming has seen at least 12 opioid overdose which is similar to the same reporting period in 2019. This number represents overdoses seen in local emergency departments and not those that go unreported. Other preliminary data from the Ontario Coroner's Office shows a 25% increase in opioid-related deaths through March, April and May 2020 compared to the same three-month period in 2019. While several factors contribute to the current overdose crisis, unregulated illicit fentanyl is believed to be a leading cause of overdoses in Ontario and Canada.

August 31st prompts opportunities to raise awareness of substance related harms, reduce the stigma of a drug-related death and spread the message that overdose death is preventable.

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