



Community and Health Services Department
Public Health Branch

Memorandum

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Dr. Karim Kurji
Medical Officer of Health

Date: April 6, 2017

Re: **York Region Public Health Opioid Response**

Background

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's 2008 Ontario Public Health Standards mandate public health units to use harm reduction policies, programmes and practices which focus on reducing harms from drug use. Harm reduction is a public health approach that helps mitigate the negative consequences of drug use on individuals and communities.

Opioid misuse is an emerging issue both nationally and provincially. In response to this issue in October 2016, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care announced a comprehensive strategy to address opioid misuse and addictions. This provincial strategy will include development and launch of a new surveillance and reporting system.

York Region experiences lower negative outcomes related to opioid use compared to other Ontario counties

Most recent and current available data indicates:

- In 2013, there were 26 opioid-related deaths in York Region and 638 opioid-related deaths in Ontario, ranking York Region 42nd out of 49 counties*
- In 2014, there were 125 opioid related emergency room visits in York Region, ranking York Region the lowest county* (49th)
- In 2014, there were 60 opioid related hospital admissions in York Region, ranking York Region 48th out of 49 counties*

- In 2015, 34,733 York Region residents used prescription opioid medications and 870 individuals were opioid maintenance therapy users, ranking York Region 49th* and 45th* respectively when compared to other counties*

*Note: A rank of 1 represents the highest rate and a rank of 49 represents the lowest rank of opioid use and related adverse events by Ontario County, as defined by the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network, 2016.

York Region Paramedic Services is equipped to respond to suspected overdoses

York Region Paramedic Service vehicles are equipped with Naloxone which allows for treatment when an opioid overdose is suspected in a patient. In 2016, York Region Paramedics responded to 39 patients requiring Naloxone. Overall, Paramedic Services has not experienced patient volume increases in opioid overdose in York Region when compared to other areas recently reported in the media. In conjunction to the Minister's announcement in October 2016, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is developing an Opioid Response Strategy for Paramedic Services to be launched in 2017.

York Region Public Health is collaborating to implement a coordinated response plan

York Region Public Health is collaborating with internal and external partners to facilitate a coordinated strategy between service providers and the community to ensure health care providers and residents have adequate knowledge regarding the safe use of prescribed opioids, opioid overdose risk factors, and where and how to access Naloxone, a medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

In York Region, an estimated 46 pharmacies have applied for and received training from the Ontario College of Pharmacists and Toronto Public Health to be able to distribute Naloxone kits to clients who use opioids, are at risk of relapsing, or are the friend or family member of an individual who uses opioids. Pharmacies require the client to present an Ontario Health Insurance Plan Card in order to obtain Naloxone at no cost. York Region Public Health is currently exploring options to increase access and availability of Naloxone in York Region.

In 2016, Public Health worked with York Regional Police, Addiction Services York Region and two local experts (a community pharmacist and an addiction treatment physician) to establish an Opioid Safety Education Forum Workgroup.

In November 2016, the workgroup hosted an Opioid Safety Education Forum that was attended by 140 health care providers. The forum objectives included:

- Reducing stigma related to opioid misuse and addiction

- Discussion of opioid use and misuse as a health and safety concern
- Increasing awareness regarding legislation changes
- Increasing knowledge of evidence-based strategies for safe prescribing and dispensing of opioids
- Increasing awareness of resources and services for health care providers and clients related to opioid safety

Next Steps

Public Health is working with a variety of external organizations and internal partners to collectively collaborate on this emerging issue. To be proactive in addressing opioid use and misuse, Public Health recommended the Opioid Safety Education Forum Workgroup expand its focus. In addition to sharing information, providing education and increasing awareness, the objectives of the group will now include surveillance and response activities. The workgroup is moving forward under the name of: Opioid Education and Response Workgroup with expanded membership including York Region Paramedic Services and Fire Services in addition to the Associate Medical Officer of Health, Public Health Epidemiology and Health Emergency Planning. Other key stakeholders are currently being explored by the workgroup. The first meeting of the workgroup was held on March 20, 2017. The workgroup will build upon the Provincial Opioid Strategy to address:

- Exploring methods to obtain up-to-date information about opioid use, misuse and overdose deaths in York Region
- Creating a data template framework incorporating available data for the purpose of gaining a greater understanding of the issue in York Region
- Assessing the potential need for and access to enhanced treatment resources and supporting and advocating for increased treatment resources in York Region
- Devising a York Region opioid response plan in collaboration with key agencies to reduce the morbidity and mortality from opioid use and misuse
- Monitoring Naloxone use, supporting and enhancing Naloxone distribution in York Region
- Developing a coordinated communication plan
- Providing education around opioid and Naloxone use and the stigma surrounding them to service providers and the community

At a future date, a report on further deliberations of the Opioid Education and Response Workgroup will be brought forward.

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