

NEED GEAR? CONDOMS? SUPPORT?

The NESI team distributes kits for safer rock smoking, rigs, and all the stuff that goes with them! We also have supplies for safer sex, and provide support and referrals to services.

Here's how to reach us...

NESI Drop In! New Summer Hours!

Times: Mondays 9am-4pm

Tuesdays 9am-4pm

Wednesdays 9am-4pm

Thursdays 9am-4pm

Fridays 9am-4pm

We're at Somerset West Community Health Centre (corner of Booth and Eccles). Drop-in for support and advocacy in a non-judgmental environment. Chat. Chill out on a couch. Grab some gear. Use a computer. Have a coffee. In a rush? You can also grab a five packs of stems or fits from reception or medical walk-in. Call us! We accept collect calls. **613.238.8210 ext.2246**

the NESI VAN

Just give us a call! **(613)761-0003**

We aim to get to you faster than your dealer.

We're out on the road:

Monday to Saturday: 5pm -11:30pm

Wednesdays: 5pm to 10pm

(Sundays no service)

We're happy to deliver supplies to you anywhere in the greater Ottawa Area. Got rigs to return? Used Pipes? We'll come get'em!

Outreach!

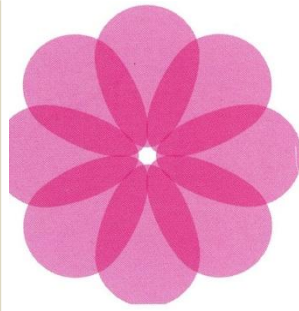
Outreach & Peer workers are out on foot throughout the week in different neighborhoods.

Call our outreach cells!

Amy: 613.219.9119

Shannon: 613.290.0363

Stan 613.295.4329



Daisy's

Support, Supplies &
Something to Eat

Fridays
5:30 - 8:30am

1475 Caldwell

Questions? 613-327-0002 or 613-722-4000 x.258

NESI Women's Harm Reduction Breakfast Drop-in

Join us for a delicious,
nutritious morning!



When? 9:30-11:30am Weds July 12th

Where? 3rd floor Somerset West
Community Health Centre, 55 Eccles



A Safe place for female identified people to talk, hang-out or just drop-in and enjoy a free breakfast.

Zen Meditation

Feeling stressed or overwhelmed?

Want to learn how to settle the mind?

**Join us Every Tuesday & Friday at noon
in the NESI Drop-in.**

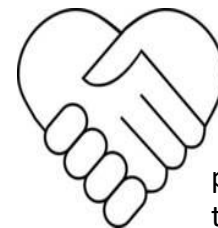
During this time, John & Bobby run a meditation class. Classes are free & all welcome! Everyone invited to attend. No experience needed!



Monthly info brought to you by SWCHC's Needle Exchange Safer Inhalation Program

Phase 1 Peer Program

Looking to make a healthy connection with other folks who use drugs? Looking to make some extra cash? Come work with the NESI program! **Every Thursday at 1PM**, our peer program compensates peers for 2 hours of work. Every **2nd Thursday** of the month we do a **Women's only day**. Work ranges from preparing smoking & injection supplies and gear, to workshops and/or gardening! Interested? Call us to find out how to join!
(613)238.8210 ext 2246



Make a Pact!

By :Eva Sowdluapik

Since so many people have been going through overdoses, a few of us friends have decided to make a pact! That is, that we NEVER do fentanyl alone!

And that when we are going to do fentanyl, we ALWAYS let somebody know, we ALWAYS carry naloxone, and these simple promises should keep us ALIVE!

We hope that you can also make a pact!

NESI is based at Somerset West Community Health Centre, 55 Eccles (Booth & Eccles)

Wanna talk? Looking for Health Care? Need Supplies?

Drop-in (every day 1-4pm), or Call a NESI worker at call 613.238.8210...

Amy ext 2319, John ext. 2270, Shannon ext. 2319, Stan ext.2392 **Evening/night? van: 613.761.0003**

International Drug User Memorial 2017

We invite you to remember those who
have touched our lives.



Friday, July 21st at 10:30am – noon

Reception to follow 12:00-2:00

at

**Sandy Hill Community Health Centre
221 Nelson Street corner of Rideau**

A group from NESI will be leaving from our hood at 10am, talk to someone at NESI if you are interested in heading down together.

Supervised Injection Service Update!

By Carl

On June 1st SWCHC's board gave the green light to send off our federal exemption application!

This means all our applications are in!

This means we are now waiting for the feds to ok our exemption from the Criminal Code, and also waiting for the province to fund everything...

Kinda like when you've given buddy the cash, and now you're waiting for him to get back with the dope!

Except it might take up to six months for him to get back...

Got that butterfly in the stomach thing going...

But we're trying to stay busy, developing policies and procedures, and running them by our community of users... and its summertime, so maybe organize a few events, etc. And, maybe the new program can be called NESIS!

METH PIPE Kits! We got'em!



Thanks for your patience!
We finally have Meth pipe kits!

What's in a kit?

1 pipe, 4 alcohol swabs, 1 mouthpiece, 1 meth pamphlet, 1 lip chap, 2 lubes
2 condoms & a nesi card. *Pick your kit from the NESI gear room or the van!*

Tips on injecting vitamin C

We've heard a fair bit lately from folks talking about the burn people feel when using & shooting vitamin C. Here's a few tips when using. Sterile citric acid reduces the risk of contamination by germs but doesn't rule it out. Avoid contact between your mouth and your injection tools.

If you feel pain or a burning sensation at the spot you hit up, stop to inject. Reduce for the following shots the quantity of citric acid. Injecting slowly will minimize irritation of the injection site

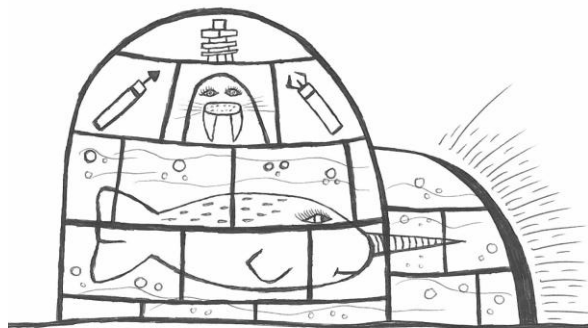
The bags are for single use only. Throw away whatever is left behind.

Acid can cause vein damage. To minimize this, use as little acid as possible. A very small quantity is sufficient to dissolve heroin or crack.

What about other acids?

To dissolve heroin or crack, an acid is usually added to the mixture. Some folks use acids like reused lemons, lemon juice or vinegar... These sources can contain germs like fungi and bacteria. Lemons and lemon juice can have a fungi that can cause cardiac infections (endocarditis) and other infections.

Pangnirtung, Nunavut



by: Jamie Lee Parsons

Cloud Cab

By: Eva Sowdluapik

This is a true story of my experience on my way to "heaven" as I remember it. It was sort of a wake-up call, a reminder to myself to be more careful, more cautious in the moments I spend doing/ using drugs...heroin to be exact.

It all began the third day after being released from Ottawa Carleton Detention Centre (OCDC) about ten years ago. I had just done doing around 30 days and like a lot of freshly released drug addicts, my time being clean for such a long time seemed to me that I just wanted to get as high as possible, for as long as possible! So there I was, third day out, tizic to the bone, looking for something to minimize the physical side effects of smoking crack for three days straight...high I mean!
(LOL!)

I was sooo sketched out, tired, hungry...spinning all around Centertown! to get as high as possible,(as quick as possible,) for as long as possible!

I was sooo sketched out, tired, hungry...spinning all around Centertown! A friend of mine suggested that maybe I should try doing some downers to help me with my tizik-ness! I was exhausted and just so over-tired that I could not pass out no matter how hard I tried! So, I figured that yeah! A little bit of heroin just might do the trick!

So, this was my only third time trying heroin. And I remember, I only did a quarter of a point. I recall and this was my last recollection of anything until I was going to Heaven...I remember the needle

was still in my arm, I was not even done injecting it in, and suddenly a cloud cabbie came and picked me up!

WOW! I hopped onto the big, white, puffy cloud and away we went!

As I hopped onto the cloud, I remember how strange I thought it was that when we were picking up people along our way to Heaven, that we would go on top of people's houses, or buildings to pick up more people that were dying, or had died already! I was really confused!

So, we kept getting higher and higher up into the sky, I remember seeing these absolutely incredibly beautiful snowflakes, big and small, in the most incredible shades and shapes, unlike normal snowflakes, these were sort of just floating around us, and I was able to stop and stare at them, studying them, wondering, where did these come from...

I realized how amazing it was on this journey that this cloud was expanding more and more, as it picked up more people! At this point, I did not know what was going on...I just thought how strange that this cloud can carry so much, so many of us...and just how incredible these snowflakes were able to shine, and change colour...everything was shiny and bright...almost as if there were various shades of white...and just how everything seem to float!

Suddenly, the cab driver asked me, if this trip was going to be one way or will it be a return trip...what! I said it will be a return trip and I looked around and realized that I was alone coming back!

Remember! You can now get your own naloxone kit from NESI! Call the van or drop by the gear room any time from 9am -4pm. Make sure to have your OHIP number on you!

Free NESI Hair Cuts!



Once a month, NESI offers free haircuts! Women's haircuts are carried out by Glenn, and we also offer basic buzz cuts for men by his apprentice stan. **Limited space! Drop by or Call us to book your spot!**

When? 1:30 -3:30 Wednesday, June 16th

Where? The NESI Drop-in

613.238.8210 ext. 2246

Thank you to the life savers!

NESI would like to say a big thank you to all the folks who are keeping one another safe using naloxone and saving friends and folks in their communities from overdose. Some of the stories folks have shared are astounding, and inspiring and demonstrate the love and solidarity folks have for one another. You are at the front lines of addressing this overdose crisis and our community is safer and people alive because your hard work and care!

We also realize that losing someone, or bringing someone back from an overdose can be an incredibly stressful and traumatizing experience. If you need to talk to us, we're here to listen. Be sure to restock on naloxone. Is your home a safe place for people to use, do you have a lot of folks using in your home at the same time? Do you need more than one kit to feel safe? Talk to someone at NESI and we can help hook you up with multiple kits.

Many folks would not be here today if it were not for you! We are grateful to you!

Joe Banks

Nobody has soul anymore
Stay a day
Stay a minute
Any hour i will be a friend
I can be a trick pony
The world is at large to me
Move on
Went to the camera to have some thoughts
Dont know where
Dont know when
Maybe you understand
Moved on to another day
This place is getting old
The night is a friend
I like drifters and outsiders
I walk on further
To another place
But my thoughts are so loud
So loud
I could not hear my eyes....

Looking to move? Can't find a place?
Trouble
paying rent? Shitty landlord?

Monica, from **Housing Help** is available for drop-in help at Somerset West Community Health Centre , 55 Eccles, every Friday!

Drop by and get the housing support you deserve! **Fridays 9am-4pm**

Loads of Love

Free Laundry for anyone who needs it!

Where? Laundry Majestic
1006 Wellington St.

When? 5-7pm
Every last Thursday of the month

Come out of the heat! Chill out.

Drug User Advocacy League

"We are a non-profit collective of active and former drug users and allies who advocate for the human rights of people who use drugs"
Connect with us!

Visit us in person when we offer yummy breakfast!

Every Tuesday Every Friday

380 Murray St. 216 Murray St.

9:30am-11:30am 9:30am-11:30am

In the lounge on ground floor Site Nurse Available



POPP

Get trained. Save a life. A naloxone kit could help you prevent a loved one from overdosing on opiates. Many fatal overdoses have already been averted by people who use who carry these kits. Get your free training and Naloxone kit today through Public Health's SITE **Peer Overdose Prevention Program (POPP)**.

How & Where?

Site Office

179 Clarence St.

Mon-Fri 8:30am-4:30pm

No OHIP number needed!

Site Van

613.232-3232

Daily 5pm-11:30pm

Untitled by: 1.1.1.



A Poppy made Queen...

By: Jessie @ ODCDC

In warm wet grass, you're a lone red flower.
So succulent sweet, your beauty is power.
As you grow + grow so very fast, like the distant crowd, so very vast, like a forest fire in abundant mass. I have to ask, my sweet, sweet flower...

Was your beauty the power that inspired you to grow, inspired you to grow into a fire proof tower...

or did you speak to the flame + whisper its name?

Did you promise it love + make it tame?
Did you embrace its heat, with your thorny frame + when you punctured its essence-did you kill its pain? Did you pray to the heavens to drown it in rain?
Did you extract the fire that was built on its rage?

Like all great Queens, she needed a name.
In the darkest of dark, those took notice of her fiery mane...

She was known as the Queen, the Queen crowned in flame, the Queen of Pain.

Rest in peace and power Matthew



September 1992-June 14th 2017
You are loved and missed by us all!

SWCHC's Raffi Balian Award

By: Naini Cloutier, E.D.

One June 21st, SWCHC was proud to recognize Robert Jamison as a recipient of the first annual Raffi Balian Award.

This award pays tribute to a member of the SWCHC catchment area for their contributions to the community of people who use drugs. It honors the long legacy of social justice, care and wisdom left behind by Raffi Balian of South Riverdale CHC's Counterfit program who changed the face of harm reduction in Canada.

With his personal life interwoven with his commitment to substance users, Raffi changed policy and created a better world. Working in harm reduction for well over two decades, Raffi was open about his own drug use, and built creative responses of compassion and dignity for those who used, while at the same time demanding harm reduction service supports and strategies to save the lives of users. It is with heavy hearts for many of us, that we lost Raffi to a tragic overdose this past December.

This award pays tribute to a person who, like him, demonstrates an unwavering commitment to building a better world for people who use drugs. We honor Raffi's legacy by honoring someone in our community who lives and breathes the principles of harm reduction, compassion and social justice on a daily basis.

This will be an annual award that pays tribute to the peers and individuals in our community who are at the front lines of responding with love and compassion to their fellow community members. This award is dedicated to those who work tirelessly, often doing unpaid work, to promote neighbourhood solidarity and care for their community. The Raffi Balian award honours the work of people who have made SWCHC and the community that we serve, a better community for everyone.

Tiger vs. Dragon

by Laura Duval



NESI

Lettuce Tower!

Thanks to our friends at Parkdale Food Centre for hooking NESI up with a lettuce tower!

Thanks to Bobby, Pat and Glenn for your ongoing maintenance.

Join us for a healthy salad once we're ready to harvest!



Workshop & Discussion: Dealing with the Police



As summer is here, so are more cops. In the past few weeks, we've heard a lot of stories of people being picked up, charged and ticketed. Join the NESI gang and a criminal lawyer for a free workshop on your legal rights when dealing with the police!

When? 1:30pm-3pm Friday, July 7th

Where? NESI Drop-in

Find out more about....

Stops, searches, arrests & charges

Talk about things like....

- What if the police want to know who you are?
 - What if the police question you?
 - When can the police search you?
- If the police suspect you of a crime, will they arrest you?
 - What are my rights if I am arrested or detained?
 - Can the police enter my home?

Questions? Talk to a NESI worker

This workshop is led by Dan Nugent, LLB (criminal lawyer)

Come for the watermelon, stay for the information!

Art with Lori

Feeling stressed? Drop by the NESI drop-in any Wednesday afternoon and do some adult colouring with Lori. Chat with others while colouring, or just Chill and colour.

Chronic pain can be a debilitating feeling...
The Chronic Disease Self-Management Program is now being offered online and for free!

What is it?

FREE, six-week, highly interactive workshop that takes place entirely online!
Participants log on at their own convenience 2-3 times per week for a total of about 2 hours per week!

Each workshop is led by two trained peer facilitators

Groups of about 25 individuals participate together

New lessons are posted each week
Confidential & anonymous!

Topics covered by the program include:

How to handle issues such as pain and fatigue
Activities for improving strength, flexibility, and endurance

Medication management

Healthy eating

Effective communication with health care providers and loved ones

Dealing with difficult emotions

Making an action plan, problem-solving, and decision making

Benefits of Participation

Gain confidence in managing your own health and maintain an active and fulfilling life

Learn how to better manage your symptoms

Learn tips to make your daily activities easier

Develop self-help tools and strategies

Mutual support with other participants living with chronic health conditions

Folks with all levels of computer skills can participate from anywhere that they can access a computer and internet. Don't have a computer? Use one of our NESI drop-in computers! The next session begins July 10th! Talk to someone at NESI, to get the details about registering!

Ottawa Public Health update Levamisole Warning

If you use cocaine or other street drugs they may have been cut with Levamisole

There have been recent reports of cocaine/crack being cut with Levamisole in Ontario. Levamisole is an antibiotic used to treat worms in animals.

There have been no current reports yet in Ottawa. Levamisole can make your immune system weak and you could become very sick with the risk of a severe life-threatening infection.

Immediate treatment is needed

Go to a hospital immediately and tell the doctor you have been using drugs that may have been contaminated by Levamisole

How to know if you have it?

High fever, chills, swollen glands

You may or may not also have

Dark skin patches, painful sores (mouth and/or butt),

skin infections, or abscesses

Lung infections that don't go away or get worse fast

Need more information?

Go to your family doctor, walk-in clinic, or the Emergency Room

Site Office at 179 Clarence or call the Site Van at 613-232-3232 (accepts collect calls)

Go to Sandy Hill Community Health Centre's Oasis Walk-In Clinic (221 Nelson St), SWCHC's walk in clinic anytime from 1-4pm



Past

By: Joe Banks

Don't worry

Good news is on the way

If things get to heavy

We'll just dream

Even when things get mean

Looking for the future

And begging for the past

Make yourself a pillar

Is it worth it

I never read the invite

Thinking it was us who carried them

Can't complain

Move on

To another day

I got plans

Days grow shorter

Places seem smaller

I still got my books

My thoughts

And my thoughts aren't loud

Change the subject

Begging for the past

Past please last

Eternally uncertain

Photo by 1.1.1.



Congrats to SWCHC's Community Award Winners!



At last month's AGM, SWCHC recognized folks who have contributed to our community and was proud to give awards to the following folks. *From left to right:* St. Luke's Table, Dalhousie Food Cupboard, Parkdale Food Centre, Bobby Jamison (Raffi Balian award) & Justice for Abdirahman.

Congrats to you all & we are grateful for your contributions in making our community a better place. Special thanks to our NESI volunteers for sweating in the sun and keeping the roads safe on barricade watch!

Endocarditis

(a fancy title for infection around your heart)

by: Joanna

Over the month of May, lots of folks who inject were admitted to hospitals for **endocarditis**! Some people attributed this to a bad a supply of crack as well as other tainted supplies of down and up. If you find yourself in this situation, don't wait, get your ass to a hospital. Don't want to go? Go with a buddy, or call a NESI worker to help get you there. A visit to the hospital may not be your first choice, but this is a serious illness, for cases like this you need an I.V. drip of antibiotics for a pretty lengthy period of time. If gone untreated, you could die!

What is it?

Bacteria or fungus move through your blood to your heart and attach themselves to the valves of your heart. This can happen quickly- or it can be gradual where symptoms come and go for a while.

Cause:

Injecting pieces of dirt or bacteria. Sometimes we are not sure why- but IDU is the greatest risk for endocarditis. The infection causes build-up on the valves of your heart making it harder for your heart to move blood as your valves start to "leak" which can be heard as a heart murmur.

Signs:

Fever

Shortness of breath

Nightsweats

Weight loss

Pale

Rash

Changes to the look of your nails that they become rounded "clubbing"

Reduce your risk:

Try to keep dirt away and bacteria out of your hit. Use new supplies EVERY time you inject

Follow the principles of vein care!

Don't keep bloody hits in your syringe for long. Never keep a bloody hit for later use!

Drinking Fluids to Stay Hydrated

By Eat Right Ontario

Fluids come from the beverages you drink and the foods that you eat.

How much fluid you need every day depends on your age, sex and activity level. Hot and humid weather can also increase your needs.

To keep your body hydrated, aim for a fluid intake of about:

3 L (12 cups) for men 19 years old and over each day;

2.2 L (9 cups) for women 19 years old and over each day.

Fluids include water and other beverages such as milk, juice, broth or soups, coffee and tea. Water is one of the best fluid choices, but it is a myth that you need 8 cups a day to stay healthy.

Fluid helps you stay healthy and energized. It also: controls your body temperature, aids digestion, carries nutrients around your body, cushions organs and joints, helps get rid of waste, keeps your bowels regular & helps bring your viens up!

Your body loses water by sweating, breathing and getting rid of waste. If you lose more fluid than you take you can get dehydrated.

What are the signs and symptoms of dehydration?

Signs and symptoms of mild dehydration include:

Thirst, dry lips and mouth, flushed skin, tiredness, dark strong smelling urine, dizziness, fainting, low blood pressure, increased heart rate & irritability.

What am I doing?

I carry on even if invisible

For I long for the return

Return of green grass, blowing leaves, and

kind smiling looks

Recollection

Remembering

What has been lost

Blow out the candles

A shadow

I have a little voice

Things cannot be reversed

Hopes - fondest

All one feels

Love

Anticipation

All that is lovely in life

Will be known by you and I

Each of us unique

Vulnerable

Lightning

Strikes

Previously

A benevolent world

Suffering

Abysmal sadness

Why

Why is it so?

Gentle

Kind

But always heartbreaking

Life

Death.....

By Joe Banks

The Bike Clinic is Back!

a message from: St. Luke's Table

Need bike repairs? Volunteers from Cycle Salvation are back this summer at St. Luke's! Check them out!

When? Every Wednesday

Get help out with tune-ups, minor repairs, tube patching and any bike questions you may have! See staff at St. Luke's to put your name on the sign up sheet!

WE LOVE YOU.

BE SAFE.

CARRY NALOXONE.



Witnessing an overdose, losing a loved one to an overdose, or even bringing someone back from an overdose can be a traumatizing event. Be sure to debrief with someone you trust.
Need Someone to listen? There is always someone at NESI to hear you out.

Preventing an Overdose

Here's some tips to reduce the chance of experiencing an overdose:

- Don't use alone
- Leave door unlocked
- Tell someone to check on you
- Start with a small amount
- Do testers to check strength
- Mixing drugs, including alcohol, increases risk of overdose
- If you do mix, choose to use drugs before alcohol (you can puke out the alcohol, but not the drug you shot up)
- Pace yourself
- Choose a safer route of taking drugs
- Be aware: using drugs while on prescribed medications can increase overdose risk
- Call 911 right away if someone overdoses [e.g. has difficulty breathing or loses consciousness]
- Some conditions can put you at higher risk (like hep C.)
- Use less if you are sick
- Use where help is easily available (e.g. most importantly around people you trust)
- Make a plan/know how to respond in case of OD.
- Be prepared to give breaths and/ or administer naloxone (Narcan) until help arrives
- Overdose response training and naloxone kits are available for free! Talk to a harm reduction worker or someone with a kit to give you the scoop!

Responding To A Fentanyl (or opioid) Overdose

Overdose is most common when...

- Your tolerance is lower (you took a break, were in detox/treatment or jail, or you are new to use)
- You have been sick, tired, run down, dehydrated or have liver issues
- You mix drugs: prescribed or not, legal or illegal
 - The drugs are stronger than you are used to: changes in supply, dealer, or town.

Feels and looks like...

- Person cannot stay awake
- Can't talk or walk
- Slow or no pulse
- Slow or no breathing, gurgling
- Skin looks pale or blue, feels cold
- Pupils are pinned or eyes rolled back
- Vomiting • Body is limp
- No response to noise or knuckles being rubbed hard on the breast bone

While you are waiting for an ambulance to arrive, follow the **Five Steps protocol**-> Stay with person. Use their name. Tell them to breathe • Call 911 and tell them person is not breathing. When paramedics arrive tell them as much as you can about drugs and dose • Use naloxone if available. Naloxone only works on opioid overdose • After naloxone a person might feel withdrawal. Do not take more drugs. Sick feeling will go away when naloxone wears off (30 –75 minutes). **Be aware: overdose can return**

IN CASE OF AN OVERDOSE EN CAS DE SURDOSE

**1 Shake & Shout
Secouer & Crier**



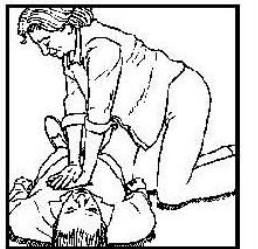
**2 Call 911 if unresponsive
Appeler 911 si inconscient**



3 Naloxone
Inject 1 ampule (1cc) of Naloxone into Arm or Leg muscle
Injecter 1 ampoule (1cc) de Naloxone dans un muscle (bras ou jambe)



**4 CPR 30 compressions,
2 breaths with mask
RCR 30 compressions,
2 respirations avec masque**



**5 Better? If not better after 3-5 minutes,
give a 2nd dose of Naloxone and continue
CPR until paramedics arrive.
Mieux? Si ce n'est pas mieux, donner une
2^e dose de Naloxone et continuer le RCR
jusqu'à l'arrivée des paramédics.**

They Talk, We Die: Silent Protest at the International Harm Reduction Conference

[originally published on volteface.me]

Co-written by: Jean-François Mary, Jordan Westfall, Marilou Gagnon, and Zoë Dodd.

On May 14th 2017, during the opening ceremony of the 25th Harm Reduction International conference in Montreal, as Canadian federal Health Minister Dr. Jane Philpott delivered a keynote speech, activists and members of the audience participated in a silent protest organized by the Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs (CAPUD). In a symbolic gesture to the Canadian federal government, participants turned their backs to the Minister while she spoke and held signs that said “They Talk, We Die” or “Life Won’t Wait”, slogans from the National Day of Action on the Overdose Crisis that saw protests in eight Canadian cities earlier this year. This action was the latest demonstration organized by CAPUD to demand an immediate and adequate response to the overdose epidemic – a response that requires a rapid policy shift from punishment to health care and support.



Canada is currently facing the worst overdose crisis in its history. Overdose deaths have increased 327% since 2008, although at present, it remains difficult to determine exactly how many people have died since Canada does not have a national reporting system to collect and keep track of this information. Last week, the federal government released preliminary and partial data showing that 2458 apparent opioid-related deaths in 2016. In reality, this number is much higher. People are dying by the hundreds every month and this crisis shows no signs of slowing down. In British-Columbia alone, a province with a 4.5 million population, 935 people died in 2016. For the first quarter of 2017, the rate of overdose deaths has almost doubled from 19.7 to 30.5 per 100 000 persons.

During the conference, some local and international attendees reflected negatively on the silent protest saying that Minister Philpott appeared to be “the best health minister in the world” with respect to harm reduction. She surely made positive declarations on harm reduction since being appointed Health Minister and reinstated harm reduction in our national anti-drug strategy, introduced legislation to streamline the process for opening a supervised injection site, facilitated access to naloxone, and made it easier to import pharmaceutical-grade heroin. She also had to deal with the legacy of the Harper era, a 10 year period during which Canada became one of the biggest opponents to harm reduction on the international stage and implemented a national anti-drug strategy that excluded harm reduction altogether. And while Minister Philpott seems genuinely concerned with the alarming rise in preventable overdose deaths and likes to remind us, as she did during her keynote speech, that she is a fierce supporter of harm reduction, we need her to take action.

We are facing an overdose crisis, not an opioid or a fentanyl crisis. People are dying because of failed policies: policies that stigmatize and marginalize people who use drugs, policies that force people to use alone, policies that restrict access to care and support, policies that fail to address social determinants of health, policies that are deeply rooted in racism and colonialism, and the list goes on. The federal government has no intention of addressing such failed policies. As such, it continues to locate opioids (and more specifically fentanyl) at the heart of the crisis and implement solutions that focus on drug prohibition, drug production, drug prescription and monitoring, and drug coverage. These solutions have been proven to be useless and costly at best but mostly harmful to people who use drugs and certainly not helpful in preventing overdose deaths.

This overdose crisis reveals the brutal nature of prohibition; something politicians cannot comprehend because they do not have a first-hand experience of it. It also reveals the inability of our political elite to go beyond warm-hearted humanist speeches and actually implement progressive and evidence-based policies that address the root causes of this overdose crisis namely prohibition, colonialism, trauma, poverty, mental health, stress, unemployment, homelessness, criminalization, institutionalization, racism, oppression, health inequities, and disenfranchisement. If the federal government was truly supportive and took this crisis seriously enough, it would channel money and resources toward the provinces to support harm reduction workers on the ground, increase access to health care and support, and create long-lasting (instead of Band-Aid) solutions.



If the federal government was truly supportive, it would adequately fund and engage with drug user associations and community-based harm reduction organizations. Much of the government spending has been directed at research, prescription monitoring, and law enforcement. We see no additional spending allocated to programs and services provided in the community by people with lived experience and harm reduction workers. We see no expansion of health care services nor support for the implementation of harm reduction services, including supervised injection services. Canada invested half a billion dollars during the SARS outbreak that fortunately caused just about 44 deaths. That equates to less than 1 week of overdose deaths in 2016 and, yet, the adequate funding needed to tackle the root of the problem is nowhere to be seen.

Nice speeches do not save lives. Actions do. Our protest was a reminder that we cannot wait any longer. We ask Minister Philpott to declare a national public health emergency. We demand actions that will effectively stop the flow of dead relatives, friends, and colleagues overcrowding our morgues. And most importantly, we call on the federal government to engage on a path to decriminalize and regulate all drugs by ending the war on drugs.