

Community event held for Overdose Awareness Day

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A group of community service agencies and concerned residents are working to increase awareness and decrease the social stigma around substance use, misuse, and overdose.

The Dufferin-Caledon Drug Strategy Committee hosted its 8th annual Overdose Awareness Day event on Aug. 28 at St. Mark's Anglican Church in Orangeville.

‘It’s important for our community to be aware of the resources and services that are available in the community to address overdose. This event can give them an opportunity to connect with various service providers to learn about the impact of overdose and how to save lives,’ said Raman Hansra, co-organizer of the local Overdose Awareness Day event.

The aim of the event is to raise awareness about the impact of overdose and share harm reduction strategies while also honouring members of the community who have been affected by overdose. Orangeville resident Angela Marshall shared her journey to becoming sober and the circumstances leading up to her addiction.

‘Little did I think my dependencies and addictions would bring more darkness into my life,’ said Marshall. ‘There were shootings, high speed police chases, I was arrested, there were sexual assaults, homelessness and even working in the sex trade.’

During the event, Marshall shared that she is 494 days sober.

‘If there is anyone struggling, you’re not alone. That was one of my biggest fears, because I always felt, asking for help was cowardly or weak,’ said Marshall. ‘Knowing how much support there is, especially in Orangeville, I have gratitude for that now that I’m sober and started making amends.’

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health, through its health partner reporting system, has learned of about 17 overdose cases in Dufferin County this year.

‘However, there are likely other overdoses that are occurring, but aren’t getting reported,’ said Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, associate medical officer of health for WDG Public Health.

While the number of deaths in 2025 as a result of drug poisoning is not yet known, WDG Public Health reports that in 2024, five people in Dufferin County died due to opioid use.

According to Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health, the average age of reported overdose in Dufferin County is 38 years old. In the reported overdose cases, opioids are involved in more than 90 per cent. Women also make up a slim majority of overdose cases so far in 2025, with roughly 59 per cent.

WDG Public Health added that opioids, including fentanyl, still account for the majority of overdoses in the region, with 80 per cent of overdose deaths in 2024 attributed to fentanyl.

In the hopes of mitigating the number of deaths caused by overdose, the Dufferin-Caledon Drug Strategy Committee had Dufferin OPP speak to attendees about the Good Samaritan Act.

Created in 2017, the Good Samaritan Act provides some legal protection for people who experience or witness an overdose and call

9-1-1 for help. A goal of the act was to address reluctance to call for emergency services or remain at the scene of an overdose due to the risk of being charged with drug possession.

“So many times, we’re seeing someone overdose and the person who’s on scene freaks out because the police are coming and they take off. They’re leaving someone completely hopeless while overdose; that’s a problem,” said Amy-Lynn Pitton, Dufferin OPP’s community engagement officer.

Pitton noted that while police will still respond to calls for service in cases of overdose, they are not allowed to charge for possession.

International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD), which is recognized on Aug. 31, is an annual commemorative day and campaign aimed at ending overdoses while also remembering those who have died and acknowledging the grief felt by family and friends left behind.

This year, the theme of International Overdose Awareness Day was “One big family: Drive by hope,” and focused on the importance of unity, compassion, and collective action in facing the overdose crisis.