

Drug Strategy Committee holds Overdose Awareness Day event



Written By **Brian Lockhart**

The Dufferin-Caledon Drug Strategy Committee hosted an event to raise awareness about addiction services available in the region last Wednesday (Aug. 31).

It was the fifth annual Overdose Awareness Day.

Each year, thousands of people from around the globe die from drug overdoses. Others survive but are left with permanent injuries that also affect family and friends.

International Overdose Awareness Day, provides an opportunity for everyone to reflect on practical ways to prevent overdose in our community.

The Dufferin-Caledon Drug Strategy Committee is a collaboration of concerned people and service providers that have organized a local Overdose Awareness Day event for the past five years.

The year's event was supported by several organizations who have a stake in overdose and addiction awareness in many different ways.

The event also had three guest speakers who shared their personal story. Two people were former users who detailed their struggles and attempt to kick their habit successfully. One young woman explained the difficulty of growing up with a parent who had an addiction, and the current struggles she faces.

?This is the work of the Dufferin-Caledon Drug Strategy Committee ? a table of several different agencies, and this is Overdose Awareness Day,? explained Tim Smith, representing the Canadian Mental Health Association of Peel Dufferin.

?We build on the issues of overdose and how our community works to support individuals who may be at risk. It's probably gotten worse through the pandemic. The issues are around drugs that are processed and then laced [with fentanyl] and people don't even know. Sometimes people will buy Xanax pills off of the street, but they're not real Xanax, they're fake. They have some of the same ingredients but then they cut fentanyl into it and people don't even know.?

Naloxone kits were being distributed at the event. For people that might be around others who use drugs, having a kit can be life

saving.

Naloxone will not prevent an overdose, but when used it will counter the effects of a fentanyl or opioid overdose for a short period and allow time for a person to be transported or wait for medical help to arrive and take over in an emergency situation.

Knowing the real facts about drugs and what to do when you see someone experiencing an overdose, saves lives.

To give an example of how powerful fentanyl can be, simple pain relievers may require a dozen pills to cause an overdose, other more powerful pills require fewer, but a fentanyl overdose can be caused by a quantity the size of a grain of sugar.

‘It’s definitely a problem in our community and other communities right across the United States and Canada,’ said Tom Reid, Chief of Dufferin Paramedic Services, of the continuing situation with drug overdoses. ‘Our hope today is to raise awareness in our community and have community members come and understand what services are available here. Mental health and addiction is one of the highest rising type of calls we get. It’s not just about opiate overdoses, we’re having things like cocktails of different drugs being used in the community. That’s why we have different services here today. We have different support groups and different community services. We’re giving away Naloxone kits because if someone is having an opiate overdose, this is first line of defence. It could be anybody. There are a lot of people who addicted in different ways to different things.’

The Dufferin County Paramedic Service released statistics for the region for the period of January to August 31, 2022.

During that time, they responded to 53 calls of drug / alcohol overdose, but were unable to determine what type drugs were involved. There were nine calls for an opioid overdose, 68 calls for alcohol intoxication, and ten calls for non-opioid overdose.