



MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

NL Harm Reduction Summit hosted in response to 23 substance use-related deaths

Hosted by a coalition of community agencies, the summit's focus is developing recommendations for improved systems of harm reduction across NL.

November 7, 2023 (St. John's) – A coalition of non-profit organizations, alongside Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, are co-hosting a provincial Harm Reduction Summit on Tuesday, November 7. Together, these agencies see an urgent and growing need to increase the level of safe and supportive services for folks engaging in substance use. “Community agencies have been on the front line of the response to the rise in deaths linked to substance use over the past several months,” says Sheldon Polett, Executive Director of Choices for Youth, “what these tragic events have shown us is that we have to invest in systems and services that address the needs of vulnerable populations while applying a harm reduction approach”.

This group of organizations started meeting in September following nearly two dozen opioid-related deaths over the summer months. These agencies include Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, Choices for Youth, Stella's Circle, End Homelessness St. John's, U-Turn Drop-In Centre, the St. John's Status of Women Council, Quadrangle NL, the AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Thrive. The goal of this coalition is to work with folks with lived experience, service providers, and policymakers to inform recommendations for consideration by the provincial government, and the All-Party Committee on Substance Use and Addictions.

This event will include a keynote address from Zoe Dodd, Community Scholar, MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions, Unity Health, and Co-Founder of Toronto Overdose Prevention Society.

“We are seeing a rise in opioid-related deaths across Canada. Addressing this requires investment in a continuum of care, including safe injection sites and safe supplies” says Zoe Dodd. “It also requires that we provide adequate staffing resources and support to those who are on the front lines of this growing crisis.”

Dr. Francoise Guigné is an assistant professor with the Memorial University of Newfoundland Discipline of Family Medicine and the Program Director for their Care of Underserved Populations Enhanced Skills residence program. Dr. Guigné, along with Dr. Thomas Ritche, is advocating for the public availability of free naloxone in pharmacies.

"As a physician who has treated many patients with naloxone, I have witnessed its life-saving effects first-hand," says Dr. Ritchie. "Nearly every other province in Canada has recognized pharmacies as a central partner in the distribution of naloxone. Unfortunately, our province continues to lag behind the standard of care in this respect, and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are suffering as a result." "We need to meet people where they are," says Dr. Guigné. "This requires investing in programs and services that meet basic needs, while immediately investing in the free and ready access of life-saving medication that's required to limit the number of fatal instances of drug use in this province".

The NL Harm Reduction Summit will kick off at 9:00am on Tuesday, November 7 at the Health Innovation Acceleration Centre. Participants are also invited to attend virtually. Media is welcome to attend between 9:00am and 3:00pm. Members of the planning team will be available for questions at 11:00am. More information is [available here](#).

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