



NEW PROGRAM AIMS TO PREVENT OVERDOSE DEATHS IN LONDON

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London, ON – According to the Chief Coroner of Ontario, 41 people in London and Middlesex County died of prescription opioid drug overdoses in 2012, more than triple the figure from 2011, and double the provincial rate. The human and health-related costs associated with overdose have reached a tipping point, requiring a response from community organizations committed to harm reduction and health promotion. Starting in June, London InterCommunity Health Centre, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC), the Middlesex-London Health Unit and the London Area Network of Substance Users (LANSU) will roll out a program to distribute naloxone in the community. Naloxone is a fast-acting, safe and proven opioid overdose-reversing medication.

“This program is a great example of community agencies working in collaboration with community members to develop a plan to save lives,” says Michelle Hurtubise, Executive Director of the London Intercommunity Health Centre. “We’re providing people with the tools and the training necessary to make a difference in our neighbourhoods.”

Through the initiative, called simply *The Naloxone Program*, people who are at risk of opioid overdose will be trained to administer naloxone. Similar overdose prevention programs in place in Ontario, and around the world provide training in basic lifesaving skills and naloxone administration to people who may witness an overdose. Once trained, individuals are given a pocket-sized overdose prevention kit which includes two doses of naloxone.

“The Naloxone Program is an important piece of an overall harm-reduction strategy designed to address the challenges that come with the drug use we’re seeing,” says Brian Lester, Executive Director of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection. “For months we’ve worked on developing this program with our partners. It enhances access to resources and services, and supports the clients we serve.”

More information about training sessions and distribution of overdose-prevention kits will be available in the weeks ahead.

“The deaths and life-long injuries attributed to drug overdoses are taking a toll on families in London and Middlesex County. This program will save valuable lives,” says Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health with the Middlesex-London Health Unit. “The Naloxone Program is a practical and appropriate response to this community crisis.”

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