

ACCKWA Statement on Harm Reduction

What is Harm Reduction?

- Harm reduction refers to policies and practices that are intended to reduce the harm associated with drug use without requiring abstinence from drug use.¹

Why is Harm Reduction Important?

- Not all people are willing or able to abstain from drug use.²
- People who access harm reduction services are more likely to seek treatment.^{2, 3}
- Harm reduction services reduce the spread of infectious disease, improves access to medical supplies, and prevent deaths from overdose.³
- Harm reduction services compliment treatment programming for a well-rounded approach to assisting people living with HIV⁴, which is in line with the four pillar commitment plan of the federal government's Canadian Drugs and Substance Strategy.

Context and Additional Considerations

- Drug use, addiction, and access to related care are affected by many factors, such as income, gender, physical and social environments, and access to healthcare, (referred as the social determinants of health).⁵
- Drug use may be a strategy to cope with challenging life experiences such as discrimination or a history of trauma⁶

¹ Harm Reduction International. (n.d.). *What is harm reduction?* Retrieved from: <https://www.hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction>

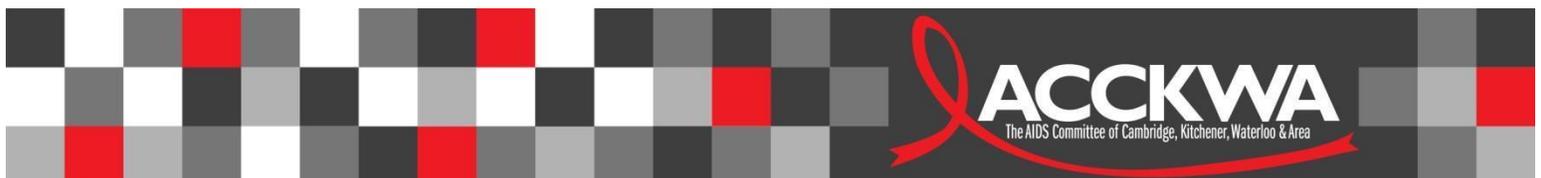
² Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.). *Harm Reduction*. Retrieved from: <https://ontario.cmha.ca>

³ AIDS Committee of Toronto. (2017, August). *Harm reduction services for people who inject drugs in Toronto*. Retrieved from: <https://www.actoronto.org/about-act/our-organization/position-statements>

⁴ Canadian Aids Treatment Information Exchange. (2018). *HIV in Canada: A primer for service providers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.catie.ca/en/hiv-canada/4/4-2/4-2-4A>

⁵ Public Health Agency of Canada. (2018). *Social determinants of health and health inequalities*. Retrieved from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/index-eng.php>

⁶ Gabor M. (2018, April 27). To help, or to at least do no harm. *Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/to-help-or-at-least-do-no-harm/article1055910/>



The Opioid Crisis

In November 2016, a statement was released at the Opioid Summit in response to Canada's growing opioid crisis.⁷ In this statement, the Opioid Crisis is cited as being a complex health and social issue with extensive consequences for individuals, families and communities. The statement acknowledges the work being done in the areas of law enforcement, corrections, and education. Although the statement draws attention to important aspects of the opioid crisis, it does not adequately address the ways that racialization and other intersecting forms of marginalization affect responses to substance use and the Opioid Crisis.

- Racialization and other forms of marginalization reduce access to prevention, harm reduction, and treatment.
- Although Black people use drugs at approximately the same rate on average White people,⁸ they are overrepresented in the criminal justice system for drug-related charges.⁹
- The attention given to the opioid crisis reflects the perception that it primarily affects White populations, who are recognized as victims, not criminals.
- It is necessary to consult with various members of racialized and marginalized communities to address the Opioid Crisis effectively and in an inclusive manner.

Position Statement

ACCKWA views Harm reduction as an important and effective strategy in addressing substance use. Substance use is a health issue and all people deserve autonomy, respect, and access to healthcare. Moreover, ACCKWA believes all responses to the Opioid Crisis must be made in consultation with the communities most affected, including those facing marginalization. In order to address substance use, we must recognize and address contextual factors that influence the use of substances and spread of infectious diseases.

⁷ Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2017). *Joint statement of action to address the opioid crisis: A collective response*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/CCSA-Joint-Statement-of-Action-Opioid-Crisis-Annual-Report-2017-en.pdf>

⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration. (2002). *Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume I. Summary of national findings* (Report No. SMA 02-3758). Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED470404.pdf>.

⁹ Trevethan, S. & Rastin, C. J. (2004). *A profile of visible minority offenders in the federal Canadian correctional system*. Retrieved from Correctional Service Canada website: https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/research/r144-eng.shtml#LinkTarget_24738

