



HL32.3 Actions to Respond to the Drug Poisoning Crisis in Toronto

December 6, 2021

Toronto Board of Health:

As the Harm Reduction Outreach Coordinator at Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre I oversee a team of frontline workers with lived experience providing direct support in enhancing safety and health through harm reduction by daily street outreach. We visit parks, apartment buildings, encampments and anywhere people who use drugs may be. We have first hand have seen many friends fall victim to the drug poisoning crisis. This past week I personally had said goodbye to three incredible people due to fatal overdoses.

According to the most recent drug alert issued by the Toronto Drug Strategy and Toronto Paramedics **There were 60 suspected opioid overdose calls on Wednesday, December 1, 2021.** This is the highest daily number of calls reported by paramedics since monitoring of this data began in 2017. Every call made represents a human life. When evaluating data we often are desensitized to the fact that each of these numbers represent an individual.

I and Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre strongly believe that the only response lays within decriminalization of illicit drugs. This framework must include people who use drugs in a directional role rather than through occasional consultation. Punitive criminal responses to a public health crisis is illogical and deeply fatal. This is not a criminal matter- this is an archaic war on drugs that has resulted only in a more volatile unregulated drug supply disproportionately effecting black and indigenous communities. People are scared to seek life saving services due to a stigma that is embedded by a criminal enforcement attitude to this public health crisis.

Melody Grant,

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