



Eastern Office:
113 - 154 Willowdale Drive
Dartmouth, NS
B2V 2W4

Head Office:
P.O. Box 2978
Fort Qu'Appelle, SK
S0G 1S0

CAAN'S Statement on International Overdose Awareness Day August 31st, 2021

We carry people with us, wherever we go. In a year where the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic transformed, exacerbated, and offered possibilities all at once in our lives, we are still seeing the reverberations unfold. This year, we have also seen the alarming climb of accidental overdoses from a toxic drug supply with the compounding weights of ongoing displacement, isolation, colonialism, and capitalism at large. For many of us who lost loved ones, we might not have had the opportunity to gather to honour, remember, grieve, and celebrate the special people in our lives and communities. We recognize and share our love for those who have passed or whose lives have been altered from overdose and those who are surviving the systems which have been built against them.

Indigenous ways of Knowing and Doing are keeping people safer during a pandemic and during a crisis of poisoned drug supplies. At CAAN, we share the belief, as described by a community member that “harm reduction is love” and harm reduction is an embodiment of Indigenous values where “patience, education, mindful judgment, meeting people where they’re at. Looking at those linkages and using the language that we have as Indigenous people around supporting each other.” We love and affirm the people in our communities who use substances, the people who are building Indigenous harm reduction on the ground through their existence and creativity, and the people who have worked to pass on knowledge that informs our work today.

On International Overdose Awareness Day, it is important to take up space through sharing, and speaking our stories. The undertow of ill health and harm- policies and systems rooted in colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism- is sustained through silence, and an evasion from being named. It is important then to acknowledge the harms that Indigenous peoples navigate as a result, including the stigma and shame that is placed on people who use drugs- but also to challenge damage-centered narratives. Dian Million writes, “Our voices rock the boat and perhaps the world.” We take this day as an opportunity to both name the ongoing impacts, but going further to share stories of Indigenous strength, pride, and resistance, as part of CAAN’s continued work in rocking the boat.





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Over the next year, CAAN alongside our partners at the Dr. Peter Centre, Interagency on Coalition and Development (ICAD), and our networks, will be pulling together the constellation of how harm reduction programming used by and for Indigenous peoples has adapted with the pandemic. We will also be sharing stories from the policy brief, “Indigenous harm reduction=reducing the harms of colonialism”, in a variety of ways. In the meantime, we have created a short compilation of stories on IOAD by our staff. In stitching our stories together, we hope that we can share the strength, nuance, and beauty of Indigenous, and our allies, perspectives’.

International Overdose Awareness Day Events (Virtual and In-person):

- Events across Canada (BC, SK, AB, ON, NS, MB) that have been registered (by individuals and organizations) on the official IOAD website: <https://www.overdoseday.com/canada/> .
- Prairie Harm Reduction: 1600 crosses will be laid at the grounds of the Saskatchewan Legislative Building to represent every person who has died from an overdose since 2010. Event information here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/135895758706349/>
- Toronto Indigenous Harm Reduction with Equitable Action for Change, Unity Kitchen, and Dashmaawaan Bemaadzinjin: Healing Gathering-ceremony, drumming, dancing, guest speakers and feast in Allan Gardens, Toronto, 4-6 pm
- https://www.instagram.com/p/CSxa9lZtTv9/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link
- Mainline Needle Exchange: Walk to Halifax Commons, remembering, calls for action, and a BBQ, Halifax, NS, 11:30-1pm.
https://www.instagram.com/p/CTAm6x8J-ZB/?utm_medium=copy_link

Educational resources:

- Overdose basics: <https://www.overdoseday.com/overdose-basics/>
- Online Naloxone training: <https://towardtheheart.com/naloxone-course>
- Policy brief, “Indigenous harm reduction=reducing the harms of colonialism” produced by CAAN and ICAD: <http://www.icad-cisd.com/pdf/Publications/Indigenous-Harm-Reduction-Policy-Brief.pdf>





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- First Nations Health Authority, harm reduction resources and information: <https://harmreduction.fnha.ca/>
- Ontario Harm Reduction Network, harm reduction strategies: <https://ohrn.org/connecting/>

Quoted material from:

CAAN & ICAD. (2019) Indigenous harm reduction=Reducing the harms of colonialism. <http://www.icad-cisd.com/pdf/Publications/Indigenous-Harm-Reduction-Policy-Brief.pdf>

Million, D. (2009) Felt sense: An Indigenous feminist approach to affect and theory. *Wicazo Sa Review* 24(2), pp. 53-76. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/361374>

