



Renfrew County & District Drug Strategy

For Immediate Release

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Drug Strategy in Development for Renfrew County and District

Like many communities across North America, the opioid crisis is having a tragic impact on local families and communities across Renfrew County and District (RCD). In 2023, there were 69 opioid overdose-related emergency department visits and 41 suspected drug poisoning deaths in RCD, with both increasing relative to 2022. The rate of suspect drug poisoning deaths in 2023 was over 3 times the rate in 2018 to 2019.

Local nonprofits, private and public sector organizations, and persons with lived experience have joined forces to begin the development of a Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy (RCDDS), led by co-chairs Dr. Jason Morgenstern, Medical Officer of Health for the Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU), and Jama Watt, Strategic Implementation Lead for the Ottawa Valley Ontario Health Team.

The drug strategy will focus on four key pillars: prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and community safety. Each pillar will be addressed by a working group comprised of related local organizations and people with direct experience of the issues.

"The RCDDS truly brings together individuals from every sector – community and social services, addiction treatment, government, residents, public health, and healthcare," states Dr. Morgenstern. "It's exciting because the strategy will help coordinate the many great initiatives already underway, while systematically identifying the most effective ways to enhance our response."

"The County of Renfrew's [mesa initiative](#), tackling homelessness, substance use, addictions, and mental health, is a great example of one initiative that is helping achieve the goals of the drug strategy," Dr. Morgenstern adds.

"Building on that, we have Addiction Treatment Services, MacKay Manor and Pathways Alcohol and Drug Treatment Services, and organizations like The Grind continuing to work hard to connect residents to treatment, while organizations such as Renfrew County and District Health Unit, the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families, Youth Wellness Hubs, and school boards, among others, are actively continuing work in education, awareness, and prevention," notes Watt.

The goals of the local drug strategy include reduced drug-related harms and overdoses, enhanced community safety, a coordinated response to drug addiction to help ensure individuals receive the help they need, and a reduction in healthcare and social service costs.

Once a draft strategy and report is developed, a key next step will be community consultation and input, expected by early 2025.

In the meantime, RCDDS partners remind residents that support is available. The [Renfrew County Addiction Treatment System](#) delivers assessment, counselling, and treatment programs to individuals who use substances. Additionally, RCDHU's [harm reduction program](#) offers safe supplies, which can be accessed at 141 Lake Street in Pembroke, OATC Renfrew, and Arnprior Shoppers Drug Mart. You can call or text 613-602-6056 during RCDHU's business hours before you arrive to pick up or return supplies. Walk-ins are also accepted.

To follow the development of the RCDDS, visit: <https://www.rcdhu.com/rcdds/>.

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Renfrew County and District Health Unit
media@rcdhu.com
Fax: 613-735-3067
www.rcdhu.com

Ottawa Valley Ontario Health Team
jamwatt@ovoht.ca
www.ovoht.ca