



Renfrew County & District Drug Strategy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Helping People Stay Safe: Local Drug Strategy Making Progress - A Harm Reduction Pillar Update

The Renfrew County & District Drug Strategy (RCDDS) is reporting early progress in helping people stay safe and healthy when it comes to substance use. Since over 30 local drug strategy partners began meeting in early 2024, and launching the strategy's report earlier this year, the RCDDS has focused on practical ways to reduce harm and save lives.

Early indicators show cause for cautious optimism that our collective efforts are making a difference. From July 1st, 2024 to June 30th, 2025 Renfrew County and District saw a 39% reduction in suspect drug-toxicity deaths and a 51% reduction in opioid-overdose visits to local emergency departments, compared to the previous 12 month period. While smaller declines are also being observed across Ontario, and year-to-year numbers can fluctuate significantly, these results suggest we are moving in the right direction.

The *Harm Reduction Pillar* is one of the key parts of this plan. It's all about meeting people where they are, offering support without judgment, and helping reduce the risks that come with drug use.

To date in 2025, the following progress has been made:

Increased Access and Awareness of Remote Spotting Services

People using drugs alone can get help through a free, 24/7 phone line called the National Overdose Response Service (NORS). It connects them with someone who can call for help if needed. This service was promoted through six social media campaigns, reaching over 45,000 people. To access NORS call 1-888-688-6677.

Community Outreach

Drug Strategy partners are meeting and serving people in their community. The health unit public health nurse outreach team provides harm reduction and other public health services to people in high need. So far in 2025, they have had over 1,300 interactions through outreach, handed out nearly 700 naloxone kits, and trained over 200 people on



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how to properly administer naloxone. Additionally, the [Mesa Team](#) has assisted 160 people through over 3,300 interactions.

Life-Saving Naloxone in Your Community

Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose. In 2024, the number of local organizations able to provide naloxone as part of the *Ontario Naloxone Program* doubled to 14, and over 4,400 doses were distributed - a 59% increase from the year before. **If you, a family member, or friend are at risk of an opioid overdose you can obtain a naloxone kit at local pharmacies or the Renfrew County and District Health Unit.** Sixteen community partners are currently distributing the life-saving naloxone kits.

"People's lives and well-being depend on getting this right," said Dr. Jason Morgenstern, Co-Chair of the RCDDS Steering Committee. "We work side-by-side with frontline teams and people with lived experience to make sure services are welcoming, evidence-based, and delivered with compassion and respect."

Co-Chair Jama Watt added, "This work is about meeting people where they are and equipping our communities with the tools and information they need to stay safe. By working together, we can reduce preventable deaths and better support those affected by substance use."

To learn more about the *Harm Reduction Pillar* and the drug strategy for Renfrew County & District, visit www.rcdhu.com/rcdds. You can follow updates, track progress and stay informed about the work that's being done.

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