



Peterborough Currents Election Special: Addictions



"We should have learned by now that these deaths are preventable, and that protecting lives requires more than one pathway... If we truly want to honour the people we have lost, we have to be willing to do what we can to prevent others from being lost too."

**- Aizha Pollock, Manager of Harm Reduction Services, PARN
on International Overdose Awareness Day 2026**

How do you respond to a public crisis as complex as opioids? The partners of the Peterborough Drug Strategy split the problem into four pillars: prevention/education, harm reduction, treatment, and enforcement/community safety – but you could equally call it a mental health crisis, a housing crisis, a crisis of social connection. As the province towards an approach focused on enforcement and treatment, forcing the closure of the local safe consumption site, Peterborough must decide how best to support people in crisis and with nowhere else to go.

How do we minimize the harm of opioids?

Harm reduction means everything from check-ins with social service staff, to handing out clean needles, to drug testing kits that detect toxic additives, to naloxone kits that can stop an opioid overdose in its tracks. Many of these services used to be offered at the downtown consumption and treatment site (CTS), until the province forced it to close earlier this year. As Dr. Thomas Piggott said at the time, "People are going to die as a result of this decision." Early evidence suggests we're now dealing with a more diffuse population with less access to life-saving supplies.

What's the best path to treatment and recovery?

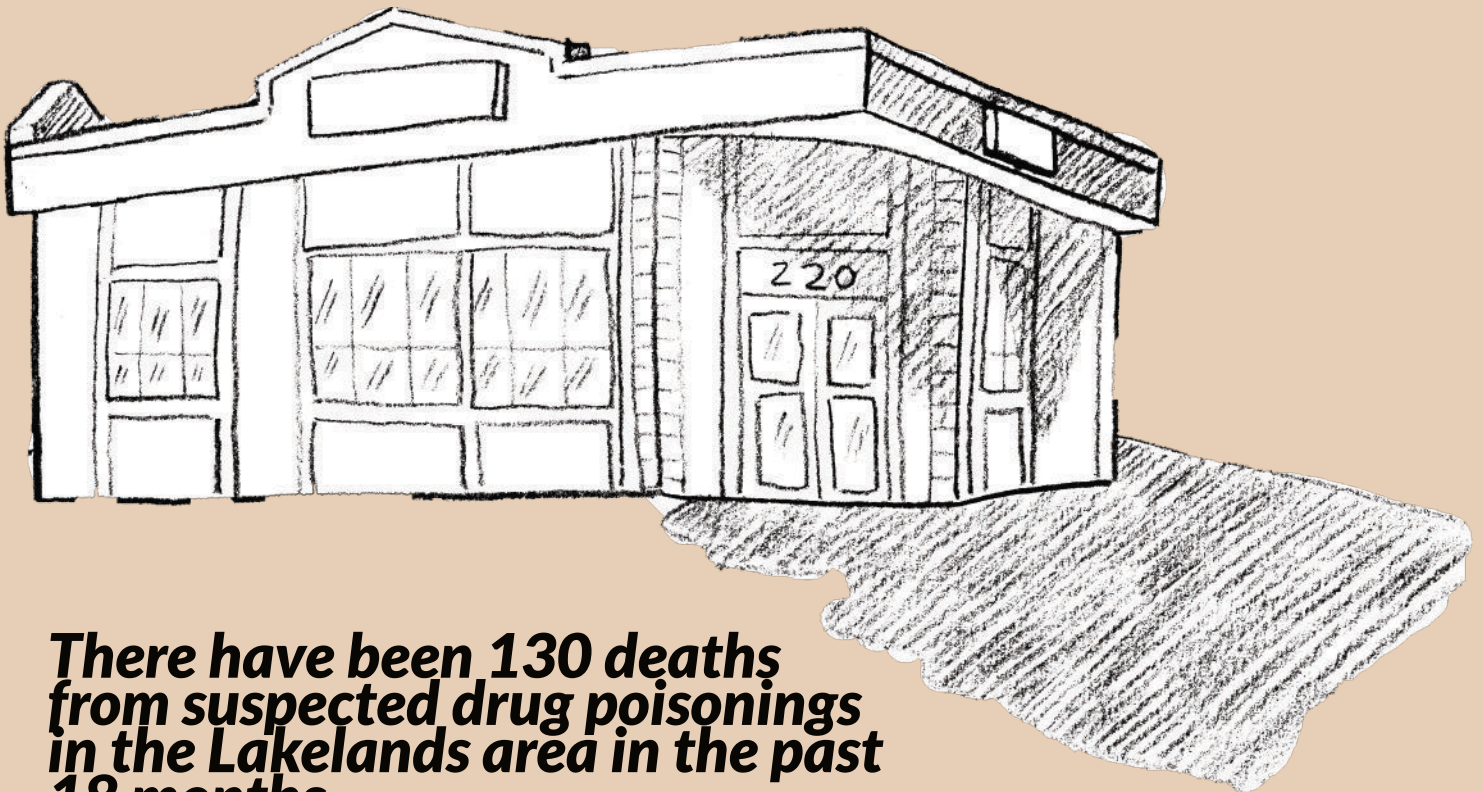
As Ontario shifts focus from harm reduction to treatment, access to good options remain limited. Publicly funded programs have months-long waitlists; the private options can cost five figures.

Harm reduction itself can be a path towards recovery. When the downtown 360 Clinic ran a safe-supply pilot in 2024, participants saw a general improvement to quality of life and a major reduction in opioid use. The province's new \$6.3 million annual investment in a local Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hub has primarily gone to new transitional housing units acknowledging that often the best treatment for addiction is a stable base of housing and support.



Addictions: By the numbers

7,436 number of safe injections at the Peterborough CTS in 2024
67% increase in opioid emergency visits in Ontario, since CTS site closures
727 number of Safer Public Spaces calls in 2025
219 number of drug-related criminal investigations in 2025



**There have been 130 deaths
from suspected drug poisonings
in the Lakelands area in the past
18 months.**

What is the role of the police in combatting addictions?

As we continue to criminalize opioid use, the police take the lead in preventing an increasingly toxic and unsafe supply of drugs entering the community and responding to calls for service about drug use in the community. The Safer Public Spaces initiative has taken a “no tolerance policy” to open-air drug use, with violators either arrested (and then generally released without charge) or told to move on. Police used to tell people to go to the CTS site – no longer an option, but the policy remains just the same.

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