



Office of the Commissioner  
Community and Health Services Department

## MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Katherine Chislett, Commissioner of Community and Health Services  
Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health

Date: August 20, 2020

Re: Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program Funding Grant

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This memorandum provides Council with information about York Region's successful application for a funding grant of \$193,600 through Health Canada's [Substance Use and Addictions Program](#). Health Canada's program supports harm reduction and treatment projects that have a focus on substance use and related harms. York Region applied for a project grant in November 2018 and received approval in June 2020 for the project *Training Youth Allies to Engage Youth and Young Adults to Talk about Cannabis*.

### ***The Training Youth Allies to Engage Youth and Young Adults to Talk about Cannabis project will increase awareness on reducing and preventing harms with cannabis use***

The project will run from October 2020 to December 2022. Project objectives include:

- To educate and train youth and young adults to become 'youth allies'. 'Youth allies' are individuals who use and/or have a history of using substances and have skills to help create safe spaces to support open discussions
- To provide information, increase awareness, knowledge for youth and young adults about cannabis use
- To reduce and prevent harms from cannabis use

A comprehensive evaluation process will be carried out by the project coordinator in collaboration with the project advisory committee, and in consultation with Public Health.

# **Involving peers as youth allies in harm reduction activities supports health equity among those who use substances**

Active participation of peers in harm reduction programming allows for fair and equitable representation, and provides valuable insights into the understanding of the local risks in the environments of individuals who use substances.

Engaging peers as ‘experts’ in harm reduction activities helps to lessen equity issues, such as capacity building and empowerment, while promoting outreach activities with vulnerable youth populations.

## **Student survey and emergency room data has demonstrated a need for this project**

The [Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey](#) is an anonymous self-administered survey conducted across the Province every two years. The survey identifies trends in grade 7 to 12 student substance use. The 2019, survey reported that among York Region grade 9 to 12 students:

- 22% reported using cannabis in the last 12 months
- 15% reported using cannabis in the last four weeks

In addition, in York Region, youth and young adults aged 12 to 29 years old experience the highest rates of emergency department visits for cannabis overdose and cannabis use disorder among all York Region residents. Table 1 outlines York Region’s rates of cannabis related emergency department visit in 12 to 29 year olds. The primary target populations for this project are youth (16 to 18 year olds) and young adults (19 to 25 year olds).

**Table 1**  
**Rates of Cannabis Related Emergency Department Visits**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Visits for Cannabis Overdoses per 100,000</b>	<b>Visits for Cannabis Use Disorder per 100,000</b>
12 to 18	14.2	151.0
19 to 24	25.6	260.3
25 to 29	16.2	202.2
Overall (all ages)	11.2	85.4

## **York Region and five community partners sit on the project advisory committee**

York Region Public Health's, Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction Program collaborates with community agencies who work with youth and young adults offering consultation on harm reduction activities, co-leading education sessions for youth, staff and peers (e.g. for individuals who use and/or have a history of using drugs), and supporting meaningful engagement for those who use substances. Five York Region community partners are part of the project advisory committee supporting this initiative:

- 360° Kids
- CAYR Community Connections (formerly AIDS Committee of York Region)
- The Krasman Centre
- YouthSpeak Performance Charity
- Addiction Services for York Region

360°Kids in collaboration with the project advisory committee will hire a project coordinator to offer leadership in formalizing project work plan activities. The project advisory committee will oversee these activities and the project timelines.

## **York Region will oversee distribution of project funds, provide in kind supports and report back to Health Canada**

Public Health will be responsible for distributing project grant funds of \$193, 600 through the project advisory committee over two years. The project advisory committee will manage the funds with the five partner agencies to cover the costs of:

- Project coordinator salary including employer related and year one IT costs
- Administration costs for five partner agencies and youth ally recruitment
- Paid training hours and travel expenses for 10 to 12 youth allies
- Training resources and materials, resource development, translation and distribution

Annually, Public Health will be responsible to provide monetary project outcome reports to Health Canada. In addition to the grant and to support the project Public Health will be providing in kind contributions such as:

- Substance Use Prevention & Harm Reduction program resources
- Epidemiology and evaluator support
- Resources for online engagement meetings and future in person meetings

These in kind contributions will not impact Public Health's COVID-19 response. In addition the grant funding and associated expenditures for this project will be included in the proposed 2021 budget.

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Dr. Karim Kurji  
Medical Officer of Health

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Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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Bruce Macgregor  
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