

Topic

The impacts of COVID-19 measures on the lives of people who use opioids and those closest to them

Key question

How did COVID-19 public health measures affect people who use opioids, and those closest to them, in the North Simcoe Muskoka region, and a Toronto centre?

Project aims

Opioid use and accidental opioid related deaths rose dramatically in Ontario, and specifically Simcoe Muskoka, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, public health measures required people to self-isolate and socially distance, and in some cases, services were reduced or paused. This project seeks to understand the perspectives of people who use opioids and those who care for them to better understand the impacts of these measures.

We are asking patients, families and providers: What led to the increase in opioid use during initial waves of COVID-19? What were the effects of the public health measures on people's lived experiences of substance use? Did stigma impact policy and practice decisions during this time? This project uses a patient-oriented research approach to explore these issues through focus groups, interviews, and narrative inquiry and analysis.

Activities

- Recruiting inpatient and outpatient partners from Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto, and community agencies.
- Conducting interviews and focus groups with patients, and hospital staff.
- Developing a policy brief related to the pandemic, public health, and opioid use. Holding a workshop for policymakers and patients to build and refine policy options.
- Publishing a policy report with recommendations for public policy.

Helpful terms

- **Patient-oriented research:** Research that involves patients and their families and caregivers in every part of the research process.
- **Public health measures:** Actions taken by to slow or stop the spread of an infectious disease, such as COVID-19.

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