



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 SW04 Harm Reduction Sunday for Summer 2025

True Document Date: August 8, 2025

Origin: College Street United Church

1. What is the issue? Why is it important?

According to Health Canada, from coast to coast, across Canada, 21 people per day died due to a toxic drug overdose. At the same time provincial governments across the country, in particular British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario have vowed, or began the process, to close life-saving harm reduction services like safe consumption sites/consumption and treatment services. In 2022, the United Church of Canada's General Council supported the proposal originated through Shining Waters Regional Council for decriminalization of illicit substances and harm reduction. Since 2022, United Churches across Canada have engaged in Naloxone training, education, and supporting harm reduction advocacy in their local communities. United Church of Canada congregations, rural and urban alike have recognized the value and worth of the lives of people who use drugs. Churches, following the ministry of Christ, have been asking themselves the questions of how best to care for the neighbours, recognizing that harm reduction is a part of this. With vital harm reduction services, such as needle exchange, drug checking, and consumption and treatment services being removed from stigmatized and marginalized communities, we are called as a church to continue to turn our hearts and souls towards support, care, and love.

2. What is happening now?

Across Canada, government officials have identified consumption and treatment services with stigmatizing language. These public statements have harmed a vulnerable population of

people. According to Health Canada, between March 2020 and August 2024, safe consumption sites/consumption and treatment service sites have reversed 43,566 overdoses with 17,713 of them requiring Naloxone. This is in relationship to the 2,751,716 visits that were made to safe consumption sites/consumption and treatment services from March 2020 to August 2024.

According to the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, in 2017 alone the Canadian Government spent 4.8 billion dollars in policing illicit substances. While Insite, a Safe Consumption Site and Harm Reduction Services Provider in Vancouver, British Columbia has saved taxpayers 18 million dollars over ten years through reduction of communicable disease transmission and providing education around harm reduction and safer drug using practices.

Canada continues to hold the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act in its laws, and this must be upheld especially in relation to the harm reduction services that are closing across Canada. The Good Samaritan Act came into law on May 4th, 2017, and stipulates that a person who seeks emergency services to respond to an overdose will be protected under the law against legal retribution for being present on the scene. However, the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act does not protect everyone, especially those who may have outstanding warrants, from being charged with production and trafficking of controlled substances, or other crimes.

In 2021, researchers from across Canada surveyed members of the public around the support of harm reduction and discovered that 64 % of Canadians supported harm reduction while 72 % supported Naloxone use/training, and Safe Consumption Services received 55 % support.

With harm reduction services being supported by a majority of Canadians, it is unfortunate that provincial and municipal governments are making deliberate decisions which are forcing those who engage in illicit substance use into spaces that are unsafe and will most likely lead to further deaths. It is well known that the communities that will most be affected by the removal of harm reduction services across Canada will be Indigenous and racialized communities as the War on Drugs, which has been ongoing for almost 70 years, has been disproportionately targeting racialized people. As such, we as the United Church of Canada find ourselves somewhere living amid these realities wondering, what can we do?

3. What is the recommendation?

We have crafted three concrete ways in which we should as the United Church of Canada move forward:

1. Declare the Sunday closest to International Overdose Awareness Day (August 31st) as 'Harm Reduction Sunday' in the United Church of Canada. Providing churches with worship resources to assist in leading worship services that are informed, destigmatizing and sensitive to the experiences of those who utilize illicit substances.
2. To write a letter to the Prime Minister of Canada and the Minister of Health and Addictions supporting harm reduction practices and the Good Samaritan Act, and its potential to be expanded to ensure that anyone experiencing a toxic drug overdose will be supported by emergency services.
3. To intentionally work with lay and ministry personnel across the country to build training opportunities and education for communities of faiths regarding harm reduction, substance use, and advocacy with people who utilize illicit substances.

4. Background information:

[Health Canada 'Supervised Consumption Sites' Information](#)

[Canadian Drug Policy Coalition 'Evidence Around Harm Reduction and Public Health-Based Drug Policies](#)

[Public Support for Harm Reduction: A population survey of Canadian adults](#)

5. How does this proposal help us live into our church's commitments on equity?

The reality is each of us, in some way, whether we know it or not, are touched by the toxic drug crisis in this country. Whether it is through a family member or friend, or even just by watching the news, we are all experiencing what has become a painful and dangerous time in the lives of people who desire community, care, and love. Safe Consumption Sites are more than merely places where people engage in safe substance use, they are also places where people seeking treatment are provided with options, where community is built and formed, and where people feel their lives matter. We as a church are called to the equity of ensuring that all we encounter – whether it be passing them by on the street or seeing their story on

our television or phone screen, with love and care.

By intentionally declaring a Harm Reduction Sunday and providing resources for the church to live into this care that we committed ourselves to in 2022, the United Church of Canada is living into the message expressed by God through Jeremiah in 29:11, when God states, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” We as the church are called to be the space of sanctuary for those who desire hope and a future. Whether people realize it or not, harm reduction does provide hope and as we read in the statistics earlier, safe consumption sites/consumption and treatment services provide a future. Building on one breath and the next, we can as a church look beyond our doors and like the Good Samaritan recognize our role in the care of our neighbour.

For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

Please select the appropriate option and provide the key discussion points for items being forwarded to the General Council:

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree without forwarding to the General Council
- ☐ Disagree and forwarding to the General Council

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: GCinfo@united-church.ca

Document Type: [Proposal](#)

General Council: [GC45](#)

Originating Body: [Shining Waters Regional Council](#)