

Brantford — Brant Community

# DRUGS STRATEGY

## Action Plan 2023



# Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Action Plan 2023

In early summer of 2016, the creation of a local drugs strategy was identified as an important community priority, in recognition of the significant impact that drug-related issues were having on our community's well-being.

The Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy development was informed by nearly two hundred individuals who provided critical feedback regarding their personal and professional perspectives. Fifty youth, 40 individuals with lived experience of substance use or addiction, and nearly 70 employees from 13 different local service organizations or institutions provided thoughtful input. Other service providers, including the Brantford Police Service, provided additional perspectives through electronic surveys. The result of this process was the development of the Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy.

Six years have passed since the development of the Drugs Strategy's initial recommendations, and 2022 made it clear that our work is more urgent than ever. Last year, an average of 21 people overdosed each month in Brantford-Brant, and each month, an average of 4 people died. Sadly, overdose rates are consistently above the provincial average within our communities. In 2022, Brantford-Brant's rate of emergency department visits for opioid overdose was 2.3 times the provincial average.

Suspected Opioid-Related Deaths in Brant and Ontario by Year

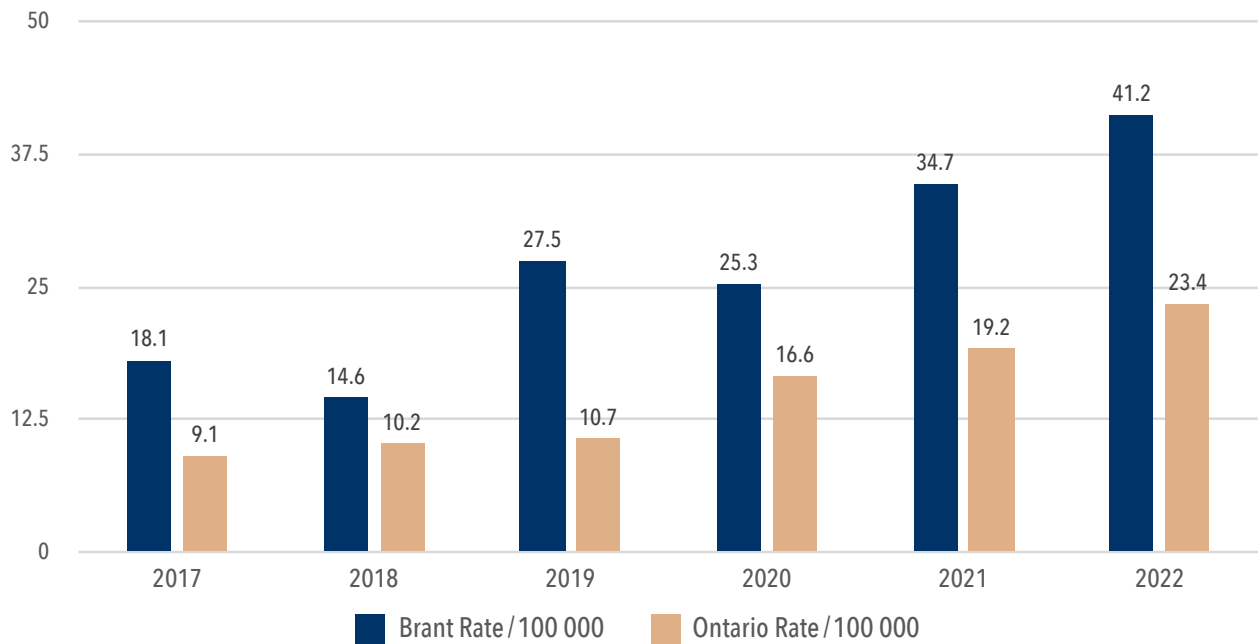


Figure 1: Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Interactive Opioid Tool. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2022. Updated January 5 2023. Death data for 2022 should be considered preliminary and is subject to change.



Alongside these enduring issues, people who use drugs are also dealing with new challenges, including increasing contamination of the opioid supply with benzodiazepines and sedatives. The pandemic was destabilizing for many, as isolation increased and services became harder to access. While progress has been made in some areas, new challenges have emerged in others.

From September through December 2022, the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee met regularly to identify the most pressing drug-related challenges faced by the community. We reviewed the original [Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy](#), identified which recommendations should be pursued most urgently, and developed a 2023 Action Plan laying out concrete, targeted steps toward

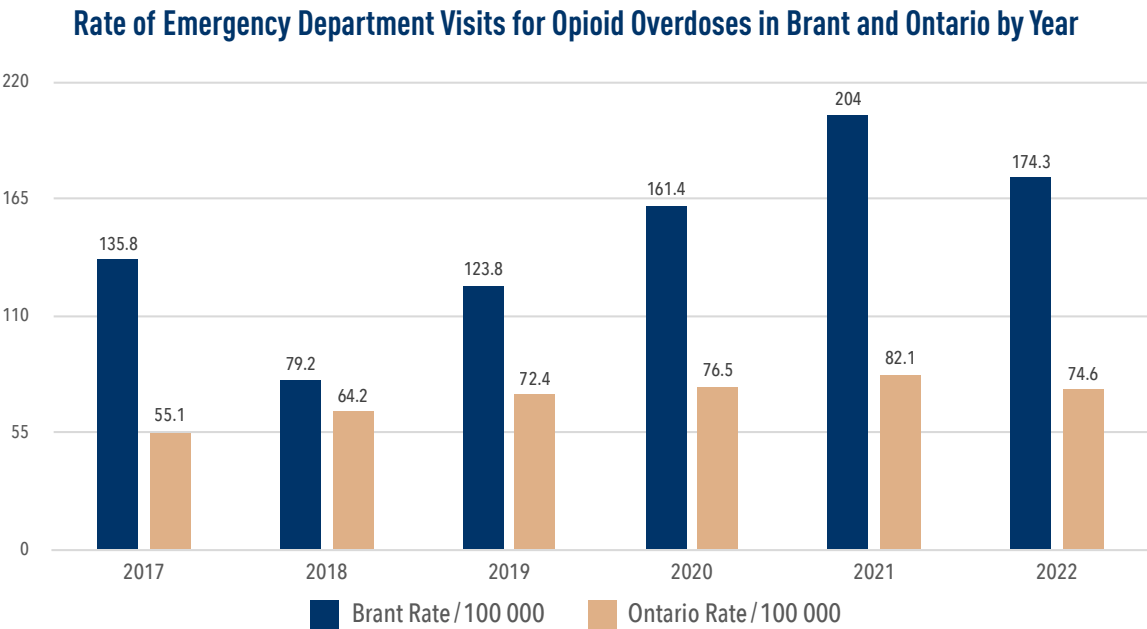
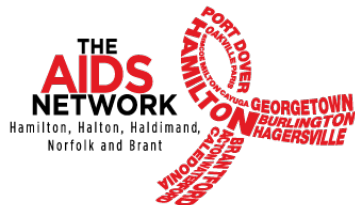


Figure 2: National Ambulatory Care Reporting System (NACRS), Canadian Institute for Health (CIHI) 2017 to January 6, 2023. Extracted January 11, 2023.

achieving these goals. This document contains the result of that effort: fourteen initiatives that the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee and its affiliated working groups will undertake in 2023 to move Brantford and the County of Brant closer to realizing the recommendations of the original Drugs Strategy. Each initiative is summarized below, along with the recommendations from the original Drugs Strategy that guided each action's development.

**The current core membership of the Coordinating Committee includes:**

- St. Leonard's Community Services
- Grand River Community Health Centre
- The AIDS Network
- The Brantford Police Service
- The Brantford Substance Users' Network
- The Brant County Health Unit
- Brant Community Healthcare System
- Woodview Mental Health and Autism Services
- The County of Brant
- The City of Brantford



**BRANT COUNTY  
HEALTH UNIT**



# Action Plan Overview

1. Pilot fentanyl test strip distribution in Brantford-Brant.
2. Open a Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) site in Brantford.
3. Refresh the surveillance work of the Drugs Strategy to improve the availability and accessibility of actionable community-level data.
4. Scale up the PreVenture program.
5. Identify and address gaps in drug-related youth engagement, prevention and service provision.
6. Improve the experience of people who use drugs in the community by reducing stigma through sector-specific anti-stigma education.
7. Assess interest and readiness among service providers for universal screening for substance use disorders.
8. Launch a drug treatment court in Brantford-Brant.
9. Support Grand River Community Health Centre's safer supply pilot.
10. Educate people who use drugs on harm reduction approaches to using drugs alone, including promotion of the Brave overdose detection app.
11. Expand access to naloxone and harm reduction supplies while ensuring ongoing collection and proper disposal of used supplies.
12. Improve the quality of services in the community for Indigenous people who use drugs.
13. Undertake preliminary exploration of service availability and appropriateness for seniors who use drugs.
14. Raise the profile of the Drugs Strategy.

# 1. Pilot fentanyl test strip distribution in Brantford-Brant.

The unpredictability of the illicit drug supply is a major driver of high rates of overdose. Fentanyl test strips are a simple tool that allow people who use drugs to detect whether fentanyl is present in the drugs that they are intending to consume and to use that information to make more informed choices about their use of these substances. Research from other jurisdictions demonstrates that fentanyl test strips can help foster safer drug use. In 2023 we will pilot this intervention in Brantford-Brant, including a rigorous evaluation. The pilot may also provide valuable surveillance information about the presence of fentanyl in our local drug supply.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

## **Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.*
- *Focus on client centered service.*

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## **Goal 4: A community that prioritizes the health and safety of its residents.**

- *Expand harm reduction outreach services.*

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## **Goal 7: A community that wants to learn more.**

- *Improve local monitoring and data collection regarding substance use, particularly on opioid usage and overdose.*



## 2. Open a Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) site in Brantford.

CTS sites are places where people can use pre-obtained drugs indoors in a safe, clean facility, and overdoses can be reversed by professional healthcare providers. At these sites, people who use drugs can access other services like primary care, mental health services, housing support, and drug treatment. Opening a CTS site has been a priority for the Drug Strategy (led by Grand River Community Health Centre) since 2019. This work was put on pause during the pandemic. In 2023 we will restart work toward opening a CTS site, beginning with public education and consultation with key stakeholders and community members while working to identify an appropriate location. We will also collect baseline data in preparation for a rigorous evaluation of the site. Once a location has been identified we will engage in extensive site-specific community consultation before moving forward with an application for operational approval from Health Canada and for funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health. For more information on this work, please visit [Grand River Community Health Centre's website](#).

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 1: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people**

- *Increase access to medically supervised mental health and addictions programming.*

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### **Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals**

- *Increase opportunities for coordinated planning with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues.*

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### **Goal 4: A community that prioritizes the health and safety of its residents**

- *Implement supervised consumption services.*

### 3. Refresh the surveillance work of the Drugs Strategy to improve the availability and accessibility of actionable community-level data.

Since we first began our surveillance work, new data sources have become available and changes in the illicit drug supply and drug use patterns have altered the kind of data that are most valuable for service providers and others in the community. This year, we will redesign the Brant County Health Unit's surveillance website and monthly surveillance reports to improve readability and content. We will also continue collecting real-time data on fatal and non-fatal overdoses, monitoring overdose trends and issuing alerts in response to spikes in overdoses or other concerns.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

#### **Goal 7: A community that wants to learn more.**

- *Improve local monitoring and data collection regarding substance use, particularly on opioid usage and overdose.*





## 4. Scale up the PreVenture program.

PreVenture is an evidence-based prevention program that aims to promote mental health and delay substance use among youth. The program is currently being piloted by Woodview Mental Health and Autism Services as part of their youth programming. In 2023, the Drugs Strategy will support Woodview as they scale up PreVenture offerings in the community.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.**

- *Increase awareness and education about substance use and mental health for youth and their caregivers.*

### **Goal 8: A community that engages, supports, and empowers youth.**

- *Encourage enhanced coordination between mental health and addiction services for youth.*



## 5. Identify and address gaps in drug-related youth engagement, prevention and service provision.

The Drugs Strategy recognizes that we need to do more to support the youth in our community as they navigate challenges related to substance use. In 2023 we will lead an assessment of existing drug-related youth engagement work happening in both the City of Brantford and County of Brant. We will identify existing gaps and develop a plan for filling them, with the goal to begin implementation of the plan in late 2023 or 2024.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.**

- *Increase awareness and education about substance use and mental health for youth and their caregivers.*
- *Improve engagement with rural community.*

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### **Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Focus on client centered service, including increasing availability of treatment options/supports that are specific to populations/individuals with specialized needs, including youth.*
- *Improve access to services for individuals living in rural communities.*

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### **Goal 8: A community that engages, supports and empowers youth.**

- *Encourage enhanced coordination between mental health and addiction services for youth.*
- *Increase awareness of programs that support youth.*
- *Seek ongoing engagement from youth.*

## 6. Improve the experience of people who use drugs in the community by reducing stigma through sector-specific anti-stigma education.

Reducing stigma against people who use drugs has long been a priority for the Drugs Strategy. In 2023, we will focus our efforts on customized sector-specific anti-stigma education for people working in professions that require them to engage with people who use drugs or drug-related issues. We will focus on two or three priority sectors this year, and if the model proves successful, expand to additional sectors in the future.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.**

- *Increase public awareness of harm reduction principles and its function in community safety.*
- *Increase public awareness of the realities of substance use, addiction, and stigma for the individual and families.*

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### **Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Increase training opportunities for frontline staff.*
- *Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.*

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### **Goal 5: A community that values the dignity, expertise and spirit of all people**

- *Launch an anti-stigma campaign targeting community members, local institutions, and services.*

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### **Goal 7: A community that wants to learn more**

- *Offer education opportunities for community members and organizations to learn about harm reduction and stigma around drug use.*



## 7. Assess interest and readiness among service providers for universal screening for substance use disorders.

Many people who may benefit from treatment or other substance use-related support are in contact with healthcare and social service providers regularly, but may not be identified as in need of drug-related services. Routine, standardized screening of individuals for substance use related needs can increase early identification and smooth referral pathways. In 2023, we will assess service providers' interest in and readiness for participating in universal screening, with the goal of pursuing implementation in 2024, if determined to be appropriate.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

**Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Advocate for coordinated and timely treatment services.*

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**Goal 6: A community that works collaboratively.**

- *Create cross-training and knowledge exchange opportunities across community service sector.*
- *Develop a standardized framework for working with individuals with addictions and mental health concerns.*



## 8. Launch a drug treatment court in Brantford-Brant.

Drug treatment courts provide an alternative to incarceration for people charged with certain low-level drug-related criminal law violations. Individuals who meet the eligibility criteria are offered the opportunity to complete a drug treatment program in lieu of moving through the traditional court process. During 2022, the Drug Strategy's Drug Treatment Court Working Group developed a proposal for the treatment component of the program. Next steps include working with criminal justice system stakeholders to develop the judicial side of the program and to seek funding for implementation.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals**

- *Increase recovery-focused solutions for individuals involved in the criminal justice system.*
- *Increase opportunities for coordinated planning with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues.*



## 9. Support Grand River Community Health Centre's safer supply pilot.

Safer supply refers to providing prescribed medications as a safer alternative to the toxic illegal drug supply to people who are at high-risk of overdose. Safer supply can help prevent overdoses, save lives, and connect people who use drugs to other health and social services. Launching a safer supply pilot was a goal of the Drugs Strategy in 2022 and the pilot launched in October. In 2023, we will support lead partner Grand River Community Health Centre by working to ensure that participants in the pilot can continue their medications while accessing other services in the community, collaborating on an evaluation of the program, and identifying opportunities to scale up.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

**Goal 1: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Increase access to medically supervised mental health and addictions programming.*

**Goal 3: A community that supports the recovery and long-term success of individuals.**

- *Increase opportunities for coordinated planning with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues.*

## 10. Educate people who use drugs on harm reduction approaches to using drugs alone, including promotion of the Brave overdose detection app.

Data from the Office of the Chief Coroner indicates that between 2019 and 2021, three-quarters of overdose deaths in Brantford-Brant occurred when an individual was using drugs alone, with no one with them to administer naloxone. We will develop a public education



campaign to encourage people to use drugs with someone who can resuscitate them following an overdose if necessary, as well as educating people on ways that they can keep themselves safer when using drugs alone. This will include promotion of the [Brave overdose detection smartphone app](#) and the [National Overdose Response Service](#) phoneline.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 1: A community that is proactive and prevention focused.**

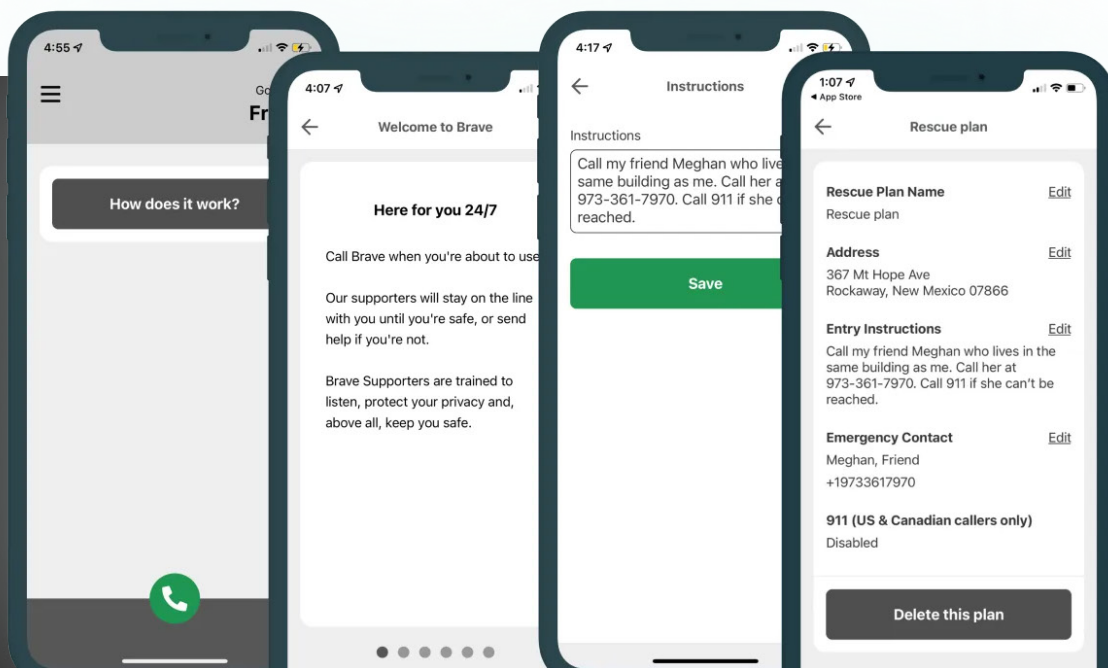
- *Increase public awareness of harm reduction principles and its function in community safety.*
- *Increase public awareness of the realities of substance use, addiction, and stigma for the individual and families.*

### **Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.*

### **Goal 7: A community that wants to learn more.**

- *Offer education opportunities for community members and organizations to learn about harm reduction and stigma around drug use.*



## 11. Expand access to naloxone and harm reduction supplies while ensuring ongoing collection and proper disposal of used supplies.

While a number of community organizations currently distribute naloxone and harm reduction supplies, we are aware of ongoing access gaps, particularly outside of normal business hours. We will conduct an assessment of naloxone and harm reduction supply access in the community, with the goal of identifying gaps and appropriate interventions to fill these gaps. We will work to continually improve our efforts to ensure proper disposal of used supplies.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Focus on client centered service, including ensuring access to programs and services that extend beyond conventional business days and hours.*
- *Explore street outreach models and/or create more centralized locations for accessing services.*
- *Improve access to services for individuals living in rural communities.*
- *Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.*

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### **Goal 4: A community that prioritizes the health and safety of its residents.**

- *Broaden access to medications that can reverse the effects of opioids (e.g. naloxone).*
- *Expand the Needle Exchange Program (NEP).*
- *Expand harm reduction outreach services.*

## 12. Improve the quality of services in the community for Indigenous people who use drugs.

We will consult with Brant's Indigenous service providers, Six Nations Mental Health and Addictions Services and Indigenous people who use drugs to identify current challenges and make recommendations to the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee on how to address them. While implementation on minor initiatives may begin in 2023, the bulk of the work to address identified issues will take place in 2024.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Focus on client centered service, including increasing availability of treatment options/supports that are specific to populations/individuals with specialized needs including Indigenous people.*
- *Promote community education and awareness of trauma-informed care, including education about the intergenerational impacts of trauma, substance use and colonialism.*
- *Integrate the experiences and knowledge of individuals with lived experience.*

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### **Goal 5: A community that values the dignity, expertise and spirit of all people.**

- *Expand Indigenous-led, culturally appropriate programming and care.*

## 13. Undertake preliminary exploration of service availability and appropriateness for seniors who use drugs.

Drugs Strategy partner organizations have identified a potential gap in service availability and appropriateness for seniors who use drugs. In 2023, the Drugs Strategy will gather information about the potential need, research senior-specific services and programming offered in other communities and make a recommendation to the Drugs Strategy Coordinating Committee about including related initiatives in the 2024 Action Plan.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 2: A community that is responsive to the unique and immediate needs of vulnerable people.**

- *Focus on client centered service, including increasing availability of treatment options/supports that are specific to populations/individuals with specialized needs (e.g. Indigenous people, youth, those with concurrent disorders, those involved in sex work, pregnant women, LGBTQ2S individuals, older adults and family members of those living with an addiction).*

## 14. Raise the profile of the Drugs Strategy.

Our 2023 Action Plan marks the first time since before the pandemic that the Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy has undertaken a comprehensive annual planning process. Building on this work we hope to be a more prominent voice in the community on drug-related issues going forward. The first step to achieving this goal is the public release of this 2023 Action Plan, which will be followed up with additional communication activities throughout the year.

*Corresponding Brantford-Brant Community Drugs Strategy Goal(s):*

### **Goal 6: A community that works collaboratively**

- *Develop a mechanism for ongoing implementation and evaluation of the Drugs Strategy.*