

LAMBTON DRUG AND ALCOHOL STRATEGY

Implementation Progress Report



2024



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Lambton Drug and Alcohol Strategy Partners collectively acknowledge that this land on which we work is part of the ancestral land of the Chippewa, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples, referred to collectively as the Anishinaabeg. It is through the connection of the Anishinaabeg with the spirit of the land, water and air that we recognize their unique cultures, traditions, and values. Together as treaty people, we have a shared responsibility to act with respect for the environment that sustains all life, protecting the future for those generations to come.

We acknowledge the pain behind the data that is presented and the people in our communities that have lost their lives – both in the ongoing drug poisoning crisis and long before.

STEERING COMMITTEE

CO-CHAIR MESSAGE



As Co-Chairs of the Lambton Drug and Alcohol Strategy, we are proud to reflect on another year of collaboration, commitment, and measurable progress in addressing substance use in our community. The Strategy continues to serve as a vital framework that unites a diverse network of community partners, service providers, and residents working to improve health and social outcomes across Lambton County.

Substance use is a complex and deeply rooted public health issue, closely linked to many social determinants of health. It demands a comprehensive, coordinated response - and it is through collective action that we find our greatest strength lies. The Strategy demonstrates the power of mobilizing community assets, local knowledge, and professional expertise to drive meaningful and lasting change.

Since 2023, our partners made significant strides toward achieving our goals. These accomplishments reflect the unwavering efforts of our partners and community members who work every day to reduce harm, support recovery, and promote well-being. Some highlights include:

- Securing funding through a successful Health Canada Emergency Treatment Fund grant, supporting initiatives to be implemented in 2025
- Launching a publicly accessible Opioid Dashboard, providing timely data on opioid-related outcomes
- Delivering coordinated communications to de-stigmatize substance use and other social determinants of health, such as housing status

These achievements illustrate what is possible when we align around shared values and a common vision. We are inspired by the commitment and creativity of those involved and encouraged by the momentum we are building together.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to addressing substance use through evidence-informed action, compassion, and collaboration. We recognize that this work is ongoing and that sustained engagement is essential to reaching those most affected and to creating equitable access to support and care.

Thank you to our partners, funders, and the residents of Lambton County who continue to contribute to this important work. Together, we are a flourishing community, working together to prevent and reduce the harms of drug and alcohol use. We are making a difference!

Sincerely,

Donna Morreau

Integrated Director
Bluewater Health and
Canadian Mental Health
Association Lambton-Kent

Jordan Banninga

Manager, Health Promotion
Lambton Public Health
County of Lambton

SUBSTANCE USE

IN LAMBTON COUNTY

People use mood-altering substances like alcohol, cannabis, opioids, tobacco, and vaping products for many different reasons. Some individuals may not observe harm from substance use while others may face serious negative effects to their health and relationships. Biological, psychological, social factors, and others can play a role in how substances impact a person's life. Addressing the harms of substance use calls for a multifaceted approach across the substance use spectrum. To learn more about the substance use spectrum, visit LambtonDAS.ca

Across Ontario, adverse events from both regulated and unregulated substances result in thousands of emergency department visits, hospitalizations and deaths each year.¹ Province-wide and in Lambton County, opioid-related deaths surged in 2020.²

Since then, rates have stabilized but remain high, and the unregulated drug supply has become increasingly contaminated.³ Although data on opioid-related harms is more readily available, the community is also experiencing notable harms related to other substances. The growing availability of alcohol, cannabis, and vapour products in retail settings raises concerns about increased use and related health impacts in the future. A coordinated local response can help address the factors contributing to these harms and better support residents.

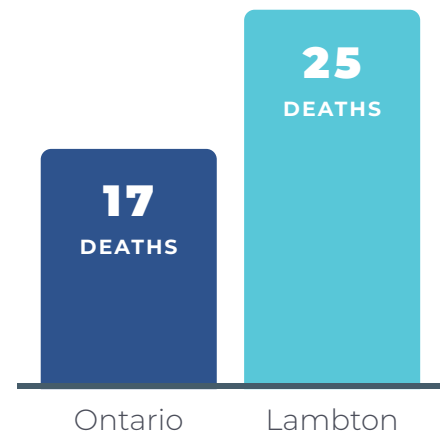




1 in 5 Lambton residents know someone in their immediate circle, either a family member or close friend, who has experienced an opioid poisoning/overdose.⁴



In Lambton County, the rate of opioid-related deaths per year remains higher than the Ontario rate at **25 deaths per 100,000** compared to **17 deaths per 100,000**, respectively, in 2024.²

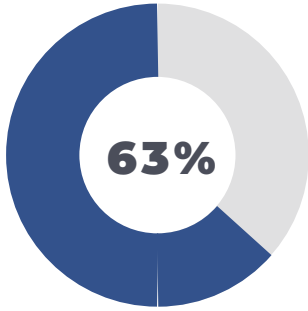


The opioid crisis has had a profound effect on rural and remote communities, where access to services and supports can be more limited. In 2024, the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario reported that Sarnia had one of the ten highest rates of opioid-related deaths across all census subdivisions in the province with populations of at least 30,000.⁵



Across Ontario, fentanyl continues to contribute to the majority (**7 in 10**) of opioid-related deaths. Stimulants and benzodiazepines are involved in nearly **7 in 10 opioid toxicity deaths**.⁵





63% of people surveyed during Lambton County's 2024 Homelessness Enumeration self-reported experiencing difficulties related to substance use (e.g., alcohol or opiates). **30%** identified addiction as a top challenge to finding housing.⁶

While the percent of Lambton residents who drink alcohol is similar to the provincial rate, binge drinking was significantly more prevalent in Lambton. An estimated **23%** of Lambton residents aged **15+** reported binge drinking, compared to **19%** of Ontarians.⁷

Ontario **19%**

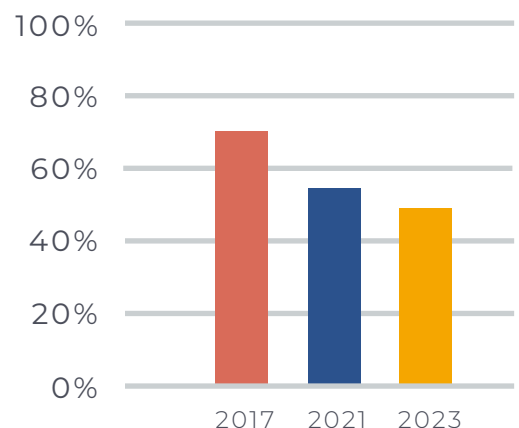
Lambton **23%**



2,247

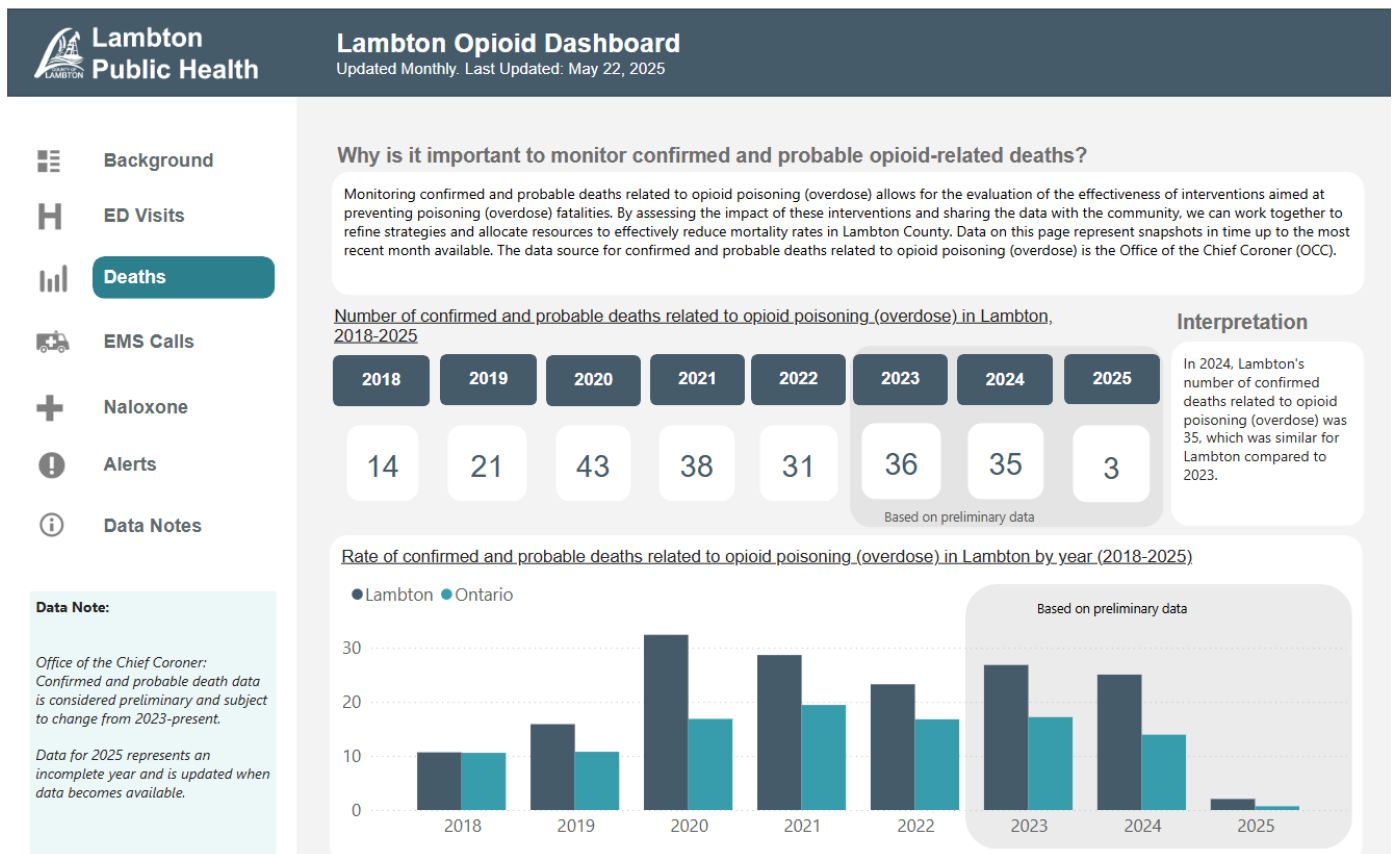
An estimated **2,247** emergency department visits per year were attributable to alcohol for Lambton residents aged 15+. Most of these were due to unintentional injury.⁸

During the pandemic, Lambton residents rated their own mental health more negatively than in previous years, and this indicator has yet to rebound. In 2023, **57%** of individuals surveyed in LPH's Community Health Survey rated their mental health as "very good" or "excellent", down from **70%** in 2017 and **59%** in 2021.⁴



LAMBTON OPIOID DASHBOARD

In July 2024, Lambton Public Health launched a publicly accessible online Opioid Dashboard, replacing its previous email-based opioid bulletin distributed to service providers. The interactive dashboard provides timely data on opioid-related ambulance calls, emergency department visits, Naloxone kit distribution, and confirmed and probable opioid poisoning (toxicity) deaths in Lambton County. This transition to an open-access digital platform was made to enhance data accessibility for service providers, community agencies, and the general public.



View the [Opioid Dashboard](#)



LAMBTON DRUG AND ALCOHOL STRATEGY



The Lambton Drug and Alcohol Strategy (LDAS) is a coordinated and collaborative approach across sectors in Lambton County to create a flourishing community that prevents and reduces the harms of drug and alcohol use. The Strategy is uniquely local, informed by data and perspectives from Lambton. To view the Strategy and how it was developed visit, LambtonDAS.ca.

This report highlights several activities made possible by the collective efforts of invested partners.

Governance

To guide the Strategy, a Steering Committee supports the work of three dedicated Pillars, each with their own set of goals, priorities, and engaged community partners. With partners from health care, education, industry, and more, the Steering Committee provides overarching leadership, decision-making and shared resources, fosters collaboration related to the six strategic priorities (Figure 1), and helps to ensure efforts are aligned with broader community strategies.

In addition, the Strategy fosters community engagement through a hub-and-spoke model tied to each organization's own advisory structure. A research report on best practices for engaging with people with lived experience was completed by the Steering Committee. This integrated structure (Figure 2) enables progress in reducing substance-related harms and promoting healthier communities across Lambton County.

FIGURE 1: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES




FIGURE 2: LAMBTON DRUG AND ALCOHOL STRATEGY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE





IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE



“The strategy has been a very good barometer for what is transpiring in the community and how various partners are responding has been very encouraging. Greater visibility to available services is a major advantage to all who attend.”

- Marcel Laporte, Pharmacist and Owner



Since the launch of the Strategy in 2023, the impact of, and policy towards substances has changed and harm continues to remain high. This reality has prompted collective action in Lambton. Demonstrating commitment, capacity, and hope for change, new and familiar partners working in substance use are collaborating on local, provincial and federal grant applications, data sharing, and problem-solving community-wide challenges through adaptive service models.

While Lambton has achieved many successes through community collaboration to date, the Strategy platform has enabled partners to come together in a timely and consistent manner to address substance-related concerns across Lambton. Steering Committee partners have reported that these efforts have been helpful in addressing key issues facing service providers by:

- Fostering partnership, collaboration, information sharing and transparency
- Reducing duplication across services
- Engaging in collaborative problem solving on community-wide challenges
- Applying for collaborative funding
- Reducing barriers to accessing services

In 2025, the Steering Committee will continue to harness these strengths and growing partnerships to achieve even greater impact. Evaluations of these partnerships and collective actions will be implemented to assess progress toward the Strategy’s vision of a flourishing community.



DEMAND REDUCTION

PROGRESS SNAPSHOT



“Ongoing community education and awareness will help to reduce stigma and create a more supportive community environment that will allow us to address the most urgent needs”

- Anita Trusler, County of Lambton Emergency Medical Services



Reducing substance demand in our community requires both a health promotion and prevention-focused approach. This pillar emphasizes preventing or delaying the onset of substance use by strengthening the community conditions that build resilience and promote healthier lifestyle choices. There are many community partners working within this space bringing the expertise of their own core programming such as YWHO (Youth Wellness Hub Ontario), Rebound's HUB program, Choices Jr., & Sr. Program, Concurrent Disorders programming, after school programs, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, and Ask a Public Health Nurse Drop-In.

In 2024, the Pillar identified 3 priority areas to help guide collaborative projects:

- Leverage, build, and enhance community assets
- Promote resilience and support healthier alternatives to substance use
- Organize and support youth-led community development

Since then, the Pillar has brought community partners together for training opportunities and hosted community information sessions for parents and youth allies. In 2025, the Pillar will continue these efforts through building capacity for youth engagement and education sessions on substance use, all while evolving to meet the current needs of the community that arise.

Talk Early, Talk Often: Youth Substance Use

Preventing substance use is key for positive youth development. In September 2024, Lambton Public Health - with support from partners - hosted Steve Keller, from Drug Free Kids Canada, to lead a county-wide initiative highlighting the importance of informed and engaged allies in preventing substance related harms. Over 350 parents and adult allies attended 6 in-person events across Lambton County, where they gained valuable insights into understanding youth substance use trends, health impacts, and how to have ongoing supportive conversations with youth about substances.

[Resources for Parents – Drug Free Kids Canada](#)



Engage & Inspire: A Youth Engagement Workshop



In October 2024, Sarnia-Lambton Rebound facilitated Youth Engagement Training for those working within the health and social service fields. The objective of this training was to provide insight and clarity surrounding youth engagement, aiming to build a foundational understanding of the topic. The training consisted of tools and models used to break down the effectiveness of youth engagement, identify inauthentic youth engagement, and challenge biases. The training aimed to incite individual, agency, and community reflection regarding the importance of intentionally engaging youth in all realms of social services.

[Sarnia-Lambton Rebound - a caring partner in the successful development of youth.](#)

Intensive Outreach Treatment (IOT) Program

In November 2024, St. Clair Child and Youth Services received funding to launch the Intensive Outreach Treatment (IOT) Program, designed after the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) model to offer flexible and accessible mental health services to children and youth aged 9–17. This initiative comes in response to a 25% increase over the past four years in the number of children and youth experiencing complex mental health needs. The IOT program provides intensive, developmentally appropriate support through in-home and community-based services, with a focus on reducing the severity of mental health challenges, improving functioning in school and relationships, and enhancing family stability to support overall well-being. By adopting a holistic, integrated approach across health, education and child welfare sectors, the program ensures smooth transitions and continuous support, helping families navigate the mental health system more effectively.

[St. Clair Child & Youth Services](#)





HARM REDUCTION

PROGRESS SNAPSHOT



“The work of the Strategy capitalized on the initiatives and priorities that have existing natural traction in Lambton. This work is rarely the sole focus of participating partners – focusing on the wins within existing mandates and agencies’ commitments can maintain momentum.”

- Ian Hanney, County of Lambton Social Services



Harm Reduction is an approach that focuses on reducing the adverse health, social, and economic consequences of an action, like reducing the negative consequences of substance use.

Throughout the County there are many organizations working from a Harm Reduction approach including specialized outreach teams, fixed site harm reduction services, substance use navigators, and the community addictions hub.

In addition to the core programming, the Pillar has taken a broad approach to reducing the harm related to substance use and has included aspects of coordinated access to services, educating and promoting empathy, and engaging in a model of peer support within their collaborative priorities. In 2025 the pillar will continue to adapt to support the changing needs of the community and reduce structural stigma through trauma informed care and stigma education sessions. This will be supported by the actualization of a 2025 Health Canada Emergency Treatment Fund grant.

Community Outreach Connects

Each week, staff who provide street-level services gather for a virtual Community Outreach Huddle, with the goal of fostering stronger collaboration, improving communication, and minimizing service duplication. This coordinated approach enhances efficiency and ensures that each location where individuals are precariously housed or living unsheltered in the community receives well-rounded, integrated support. The huddle represents a key step in building a more unified, responsive network of service providers that extends into the coordination and operation of daily services. Beyond information sharing, partners also have the opportunity to expand their skills and engage in collaborative learning experiences such as partnering with a Sarnia Fire Prevention Officer to receive training on identifying hazards and risks in encampment locations in the fall of 2024.

[Community Outreach - County of Lambton](#)

Participating Partners Include:

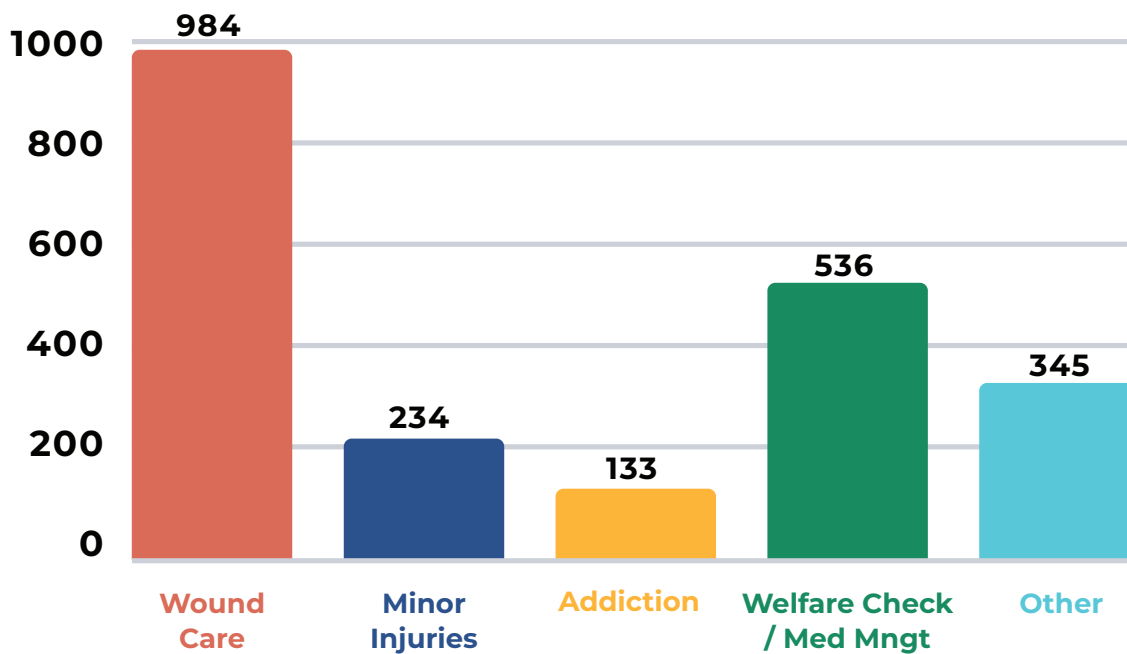
- County of Lambton Homelessness Outreach Team
- Community Health Integrated Care (CHIC) Team
- North Lambton Community Health Centre
- Lambton Public Health Outreach Nurse
- IMPACT Team – Sarnia Police Services



Community Health Integrated Care (CHIC) team

Launched in June 2024, the CHIC team pairs Substance Use Navigators from Bluewater Health, who have experience intervening in acute mental health and substance misuse events, alongside the medical skill sets of Lambton EMS Paramedics. The team is deployed daily from 10:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m. and provides on scene interventions, rapid connections with primary care and withdrawal management, and ongoing community-based supports to divert those with lower acuity and community-manageable episodes away from hospital emergency departments or police detention. Between June 7, 2024, to March 31, 2025, the CHIC team supported 2151 engagements with community members.

[Emergency Medical Services - County of Lambton](#)





SUPPLY REDUCTION

PROGRESS SNAPSHOT



“The pillar brings together partners to discuss changes in the supply and distribution pathways to support safer communities.”

- Stephen Turner, County of Lambton Emergency Medical Services



Supply reduction focuses on both the enforcement of substance-related laws as well as increasing access to treatment. The goal of the Supply Reduction Pillar is to create a healthier community by limiting, regulating, and encouraging responsible access to substances.

Partners at the table bring and share expertise from a wide range of core programming including policing, public health, the justice system, as well as the pharmacies, primary care and acute care. This platform creates a unique network for discussing supply related issues.

In 2024, the workgroup identified the areas they see as priorities to continue to move work forward. These include:

- Supporting pain management and prescribing practices
- Expanding and improving existing court diversion programs
- Reducing the availability of substances in the home – including alcohol and pharmaceuticals
- Increasing access to treatment for addictions

Continuing with the momentum, the group will support the launch of Lifeguard [Connect Digital Health App](#) as well as safe storage and disposal of substances in the home and community.

Sarnia Lambton MobileCare Clinic

Launched in 2023 the MobileCare clinic on wheels brings primary care and mental health and addictions care to individuals when and where they need it. As a free walk-in service for all community members, this innovative model of care aims to make access to vital health care easy and reduce Hospital and Emergency Department use by fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment where individuals can build meaningful relationships with care providers.

Other key objectives of the clinic include:

- Provide early intervention care in a culturally competent and safe manner
- Offer Mental Health First Response, Primary Care and Addictions services together under one roof, close to home
- Reduce the need for clients to travel to access healthcare services
- Provide system navigation to foster connections and reduce barriers to care

To find out when it is in your neighbourhood next, check out the [Mobile Care Clinic](#).



Tobacco and Vapour Product Test Shopping

In Ontario, under the Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA), public health enforcement officers and youth test shoppers conduct youth access inspections of tobacco and vapour product retailers to ensure compliance with age restrictions and ID requirements. In 2024, 94% of locations passed, up from 91% in 2023 and 89% in 2022. Officers also inspect vendors for compliance with display and promotion rules. Common violations include visible products and/or manufacturer signage that constitutes promotion.

In collaboration with school administrators, officers also inspect schools to enforce smoke-and vapour-free laws, ensure proper signage, and provide education to staff and students.

LambtonPublicHealth.ca

Sarnia Police Services

The Sarnia Police Services supports the community to address criminal aspects of substance use through enforcement and connecting to community health and social services. The Major Case Action Team (MCAT) responds to drug and firearm related offences. In 2024, MCAT made tremendous efforts to reduce the supply of dangerous substances in the community seizing \$417,560 worth of drugs, including fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamine.

In 2024, the specialized Integrated Mobile Police and Community Team (IMPACT) connected with 316 unique individuals experiencing substance use problems, offering support and connection in over 1200 different engagements. [Sarnia Police Services](#)

Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) - Lambton

The OPP works to reduce the local supply of dangerous substances through enforcement and collaboration with community partners. In 2024, the Lambton OPP Community Street Crime Unit carried out extensive enforcement efforts to reduce the local supply of controlled substances. This included 89 investigations, 107 warrants, and participation in 34 warrant entries. As a result, significant quantities of controlled substances and firearms were seized, reflecting ongoing concerns related to fentanyl and methamphetamine in particular. The street value of all substances seized in 2024 amounted to \$933,995.





LOOKING FORWARD

NEXT STEPS FOR LDAS



“The drug and alcohol strategy is the forum where we can bring together ideas, share what’s needed and figure things out”

- Jordan Banninga, Lambton Public Health

The collective action of the Strategy is just beginning. The Strategy’s long-term plan is aspirational acknowledging that while these efforts are important, the priorities may change. The value of the Strategy now is in how the community is able to come together to strengthen existing efforts and explore new ones to reduce demand for, harm from, and supply of drugs and alcohol in Lambton. As we move forward with engaging priority populations, challenging stigma, responding to community needs, and building our ability to collaborate using data, we carry hope. Our community is leveraging the resources we have and listening to people in need and each other to ensure they’re being used to help Lambton County flourish.

To keep updated on the work of the Strategy or to contact us visit LambtonDAS.ca.

STEERING COMMITTEE

- Aamjiwnaang First Nation
- BASES
- Bluewater Health
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Lambton Kent
- Chippewas of Kettle & Stony Point First Nation
- Emergency Medical Services – County of Lambton
- Hogan Pharmacy Downtown
- Lambton Kent District School Board
- Lambton Public Health
- North Lambton Community Health Centre
- Ontario Health West
- Ontario Provincial Police – Lambton
- Rapids Family Health Team
- Sarnia Construction Association
- Sarnia Lambton OHT
- Sarnia-Lambton Rebound
- Social Services, County of Lambton
- St. Clair Catholic District School Board
- St. Clair Child and Youth Services
- Sarnia Police Service
- Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society
- Walpole Island First Nation

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