

LAMBTON DRUG AND ALCOHOL STRATEGY

Seeing the Forest and the Trees:
Implementation Progress Report

2025



HOW TO CITE THIS REPORT:

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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 lives lost to substance use, and the families and communities forever changed by that loss. We hold space for grief, remembering that every number represents a person, a life, and a loved one.

Co-Chair Message



Over the past year, we've faced significant challenges. We continue to see the impacts of a toxic and unpredictable drug supply, increasing polysubstance use, and growing complexity as mental health and substance use needs intersect. At the same time, our system has felt real pressure - on frontline staff, on services, and on the people in our community trying to access care.

And yet, despite these challenges, we have made meaningful progress together.

We have strengthened collaboration across sectors - health, public health, community agencies, and first responders - recognizing that no single organization can do this work alone.

We've improved access to care, working toward more coordinated pathways that help people get the right support when they need it.

We've expanded stigma reduction efforts, including training that is helping shift perspectives and promote more compassionate, person-centered care.

We've seen the opening and enhancement of programs and services, increasing our community's capacity to respond.

And importantly, we've continued to invest in prevention, especially with youth, while also working to reduce barriers that prevent people from seeking help - whether those barriers are systemic, geographic, or rooted in stigma.

We continue to build on that momentum through learning, sharing, and strengthening our collective response. By aligning our efforts and continuing to push forward together, we are creating a system that is more accessible, more connected, and more responsive to the needs of our community.

We would like to thank the community for the resilience and collaborative spirit demonstrated every day as we continue in our commitment to this shared vision.

Substance Use in Lambton County

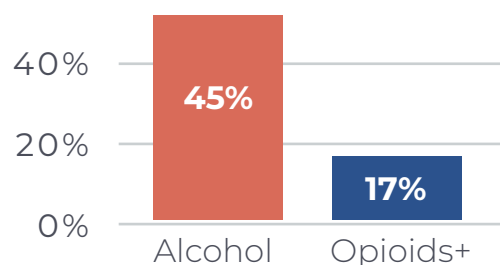
People use substances such as alcohol, cannabis, opioids, tobacco, and vaping products for a variety of reasons. While some people may not experience noticeable harm, others may experience significant negative impacts on their health and relationships. How substances affect an individual can depend on a variety of biological, psychological, and social factors. Reducing the harms associated with substance use requires a comprehensive approach that considers the full spectrum of use. To learn more about the substance use continuum, visit LambtonDAS.ca.

Across Ontario, harms related to regulated and unregulated substances have resulted in thousands of emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and deaths each year. Provincially and within Lambton County, opioid-related deaths have shown a decline since 2024. While data on opioid-related harms has become more accessible, the community continues to experience significant impacts from other substances. Increased retail availability of alcohol, cannabis, and vapour products has raised concerns about potential increases in use and associated health effects. A coordinated local response is needed to address the underlying factors contributing to these harms and to better support community well-being.

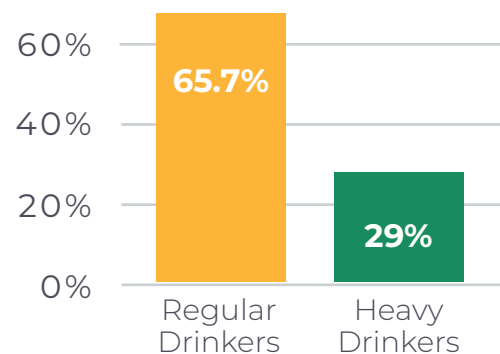
Data Snapshot

Over 900 emergency department visits in 2025 were related to substances.

Of those visits, 411 or approximately 45% were related to alcohol and 154, or approximately 17%, were related to opioids, benzodiazepine, or stimulant/psychotropic medication overdoses.¹



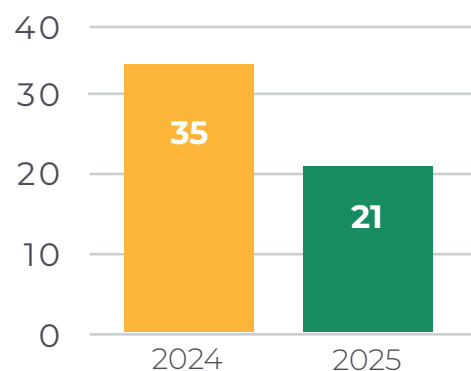
Lambton residents over the age of 18 were more likely to report being regular or heavy drinkers compared to the Ontario average. Of Lambton residents over 18, 65.7% were regular drinks (drinking at least once per month) and 29% were heavy drinkers (women drinking four or more drinks and men drinking five or more drinks in a single occasion).²



In 2025, Lambton EMS calls for opioid poisonings decreased 30% from 2024 (194 calls in 2025 compared to 273 calls in 2024). The number of clients refusing transport also declined by about 60% - from 7/month in 2024 to 3/month in 2025 (down 58%).³



In 2025, there were 21 opioid-related deaths in Lambton County, down from 35 in 2024 (based on available preliminary data). The decrease in opioid-related deaths is a trend similar to that seen across Canada; however, rates remain higher in Lambton than Ontario.



People in neighbourhoods with challenges related to access to resources, housing, and racism/discrimination experienced health inequities. Specifically, those living in more **marginalized neighbourhoods** had higher rates of emergency department visits related to mental health and alcohol when compared to the least marginalized neighbourhoods.^{5, 6}



In 2025, over 5,300 naloxone kits were distributed across Lambton County by community partners. An additional 116 individuals were also trained to administer naloxone.^{7,8}

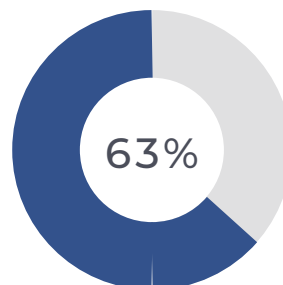


5,300 Naloxone Kits

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.⁹

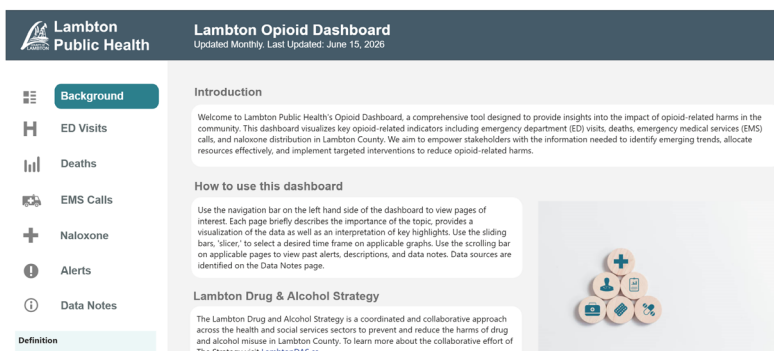


63% of people surveyed during Lambton County's 2024 Homelessness Enumeration self-reported experiencing difficulties related to substance use (e.g. alcohol or opiates). 30% identified **addiction as a top challenge** to finding housing.¹⁰



Opioid Dashboard

Lambton Public Health's interactive dashboard provides data on key indicators of opioid-related harms in Lambton County, including ambulance responses, emergency department visits, Naloxone kit distribution, and confirmed and probable opioid toxicity deaths. The platform is updated on a monthly basis to ensure that users have access to current information. By making this data publicly available in an accessible format, the dashboard enhances transparency and supports informed decision-making among service providers, community organizations, and the general public. To view the dashboard, visit lambtonpublichealth.ca.



LDAS Strategy Overview

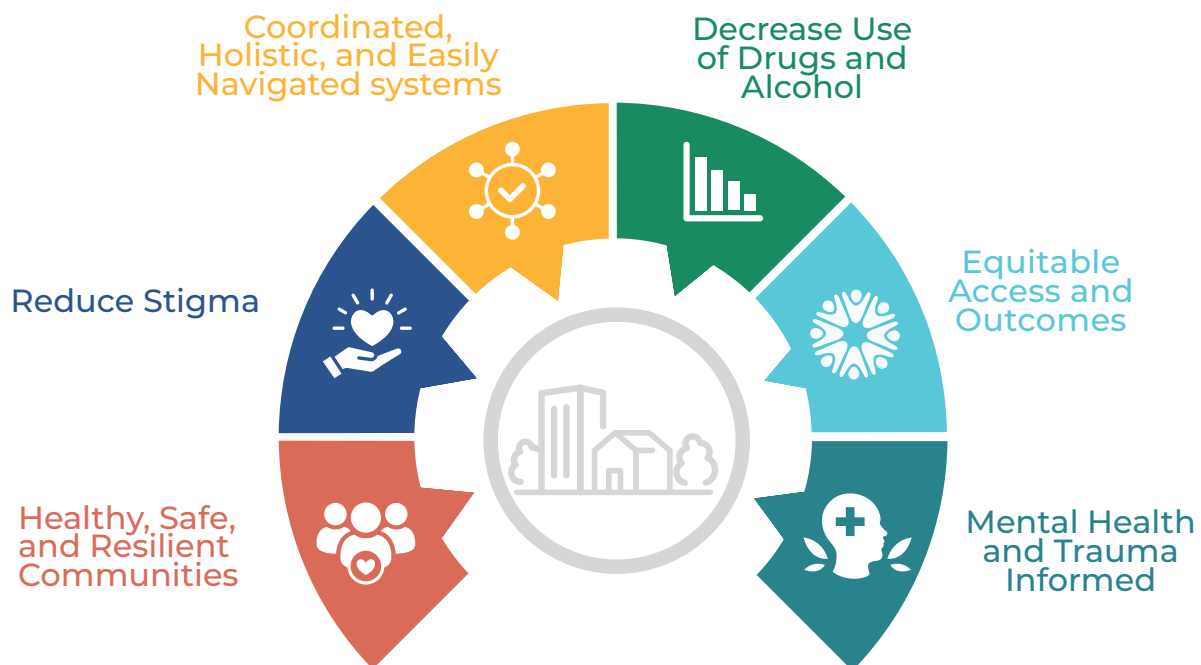


The Lambton Drug and Alcohol Strategy (“LDAS” or “the Strategy”) is a coordinated and collaborative approach across sectors in Lambton County to create a flourishing community that prevents and reduces the harms of drug and alcohol use. The Strategy is uniquely local, informed by data and perspectives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

Governance

The Strategy partnership is comprised of a Steering Committee and three corresponding Pillar tables: Demand Reduction, Harm Reduction, and Supply Reduction. These groups meet regularly to exchange knowledge and expertise, coordinate services, and leverage relationships to advance local solutions towards the Pillar’s goals and Strategy priorities. 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.

Figure 1 - Strategic Priorities



In addition to the formalized Pillars, the partnership continues to engage community members across the lifespan through local programs and services, bringing those perspectives forward through the Strategy’s governance structure. This integrated structure continues to build on the hub-and-spoke model that was adopted in 2023, using data and expertise from communities to reduce substance-related harms at a strategy level and promote a healthier Lambton County for individuals.

To improve clarity and continue to advance engaging communities in this work, the LDAS Steering Committee approved a new Terms of Reference. Updates included clarifying roles and responsibilities of members, the process for adding new members including members of the community, and more accurately reflecting the current structure of LDAS by including work groups. Both the Steering Committee and Pillars tables were consulted in the process since the Terms were adapted to act for all groups in LDAS to foster consistency and keep administrative and strategic decisions at the Steering Committee level.



Partnership Updates



Progressing into the Strategy's third year of collective partnership, the work, and network, continue to grow. In early 2026, partners completed an assessment survey to understand perceived effectiveness, value, and impact of LDAS as a partnership from those who were involved in the work in 2025 (n=28). The vast majority of respondents agreed with the statements on effectiveness, value, and impact, with 100% stating agreement that LDAS had made progress towards its goals, and the meetings support information sharing, collaboration, and opportunities to share openly about perspectives. When asked about where the partnership made the largest impact, partners identified:

- Strengthened collaboration and partnerships from across disciplines
- Improved communication and information sharing
- Increased community awareness
- Improved coordination and access to resources
- Highlighted the importance of meaningful youth engagement

Partners were also invited to share how their involvement with LDAS has impacted their work and organization's programs and services. Just under half (46%) of respondents stated that their organization had made changes to their values, actions, or services because of their involvement with LDAS. These changes included:

- More responsive and compassionate service delivery
- Improved alignment and more targeted supports
- Increased capacity through training and grants, strengthening organizations and community response
- Commitment to engagement of people with lived experience in shaping services
- Expanded harm reduction and crisis response efforts
- Enhanced cross-sector collaboration, coordination, and communication

Furthermore, 36% of respondents reported that their organization has provided additional or enhanced services because of their participation in LDAS. These enhancements included:

- New training and capacity building opportunities
- Expanded harm reduction initiatives
- Stronger partnerships and system coordination including grants and resource development
- Youth engagement and leadership opportunities

Partners also shared opportunities for improving LDAS processes in order to see greater collective impact. Some respondents indicated clarifying roles and responsibilities and continuing to bring new information about services, trends, or issues is still needed. In 2026, the partnership will work to improve communication and transparency, update the Terms of Reference and meeting agendas, and support priorities identified by the Summit as important ways to leverage improvement.



Implementation Update



As the strategy enters its third year of implementation, the partnership continues to grow. Building on many collective successes, 2025 brought further momentum through the creation of new working groups to address emerging issues, the involvement of new partners whose mandates align with the Strategy, and several collective grant applications. When asked where the partnership made the greatest impact, partner organizations pointed to stronger cross-disciplinary collaboration, improved communication and information sharing, increased community awareness, better coordination and access to resources, and a renewed emphasis on meaningful youth engagement.

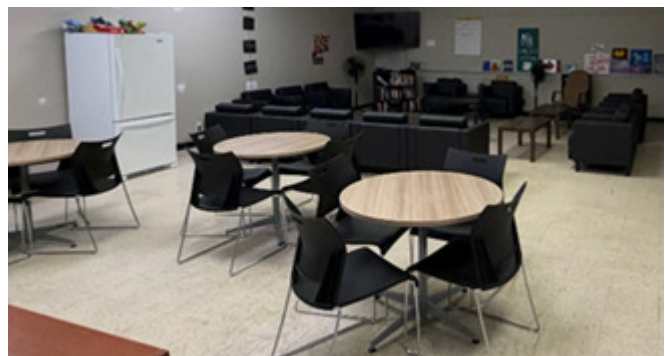
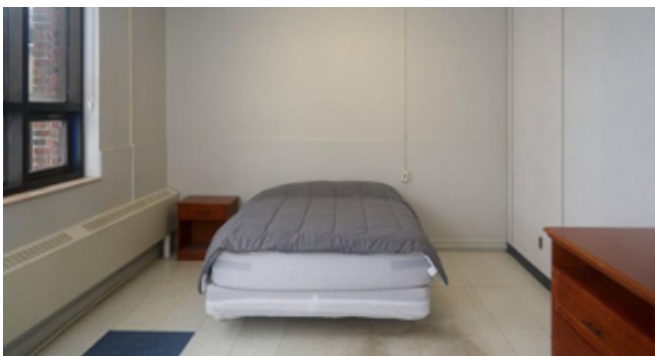
Grounded in the understanding that substance use exists along a continuum, the Strategy supports a comprehensive and adaptive response that meets the full range of population needs. While many partners may align their work with a single Pillar, recent analysis of 91 local programs and services highlights that most contribute to multiple Pillar goals and strategic priorities. The report indicates which of the strategic priorities each highlighted program or service contributes to, demonstrating the importance of an interconnected system of services in responding to the complex nature of substance use harms.

Collective Impact



Sarnia-Lambton Homelessness and Addictions Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub

The Sarnia-Lambton Homelessness and Addictions Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub is a centralized, community-based model of care designed to bring partners together in the same space to streamline access to mental health, addictions, housing, and social supports through a “no wrong door” approach. Although the Transitional Recovery Beds officially launched in early 2026 at the 275 Wellington St. address, 2025 saw the continued provision of services and supports at the drop-in space as well as the Mobile Care Bus throughout the development and integration of the model. By consolidating services that were previously fragmented, the model enables barrier-free, rapid access to coordinated care in one location, supported by partnerships among organizations like Canadian Mental Health Association, Bluewater Health, and the County of Lambton.





Emergency Treatment Fund – Accelerating Community Mobilization to Drug Poisoning Crisis

Detection, Mobile Outreach, and Trauma-Informed Care

In 2024, the County of Lambton, Sarnia Police Services, Sarnia-Lambton Ontario Health Team, Bluewater Health, and North Lambton Community Health Centre submitted a collaborative proposal to accelerate community mobilization through detection, mobile outreach, and trauma-informed care. In 2025, their application was awarded over \$800,000 to purchase two community clinical vans, a drug analysis device for police, and to fund four trauma-informed care education sessions for service providers across Lambton.

The two community clinical vans augment mobile outreach services provided by North Lambton Community Health Centre and Community Health Integrated Care (CHIC). These vehicles enable existing staff to provide additional support that is accessible and non-stigmatizing. Mobile outreach staff provide wound care and other services to our neighbors who have difficulty accessing health services, reducing risks for both blood-borne infections and connecting people to additional, ongoing care as needed.



Trauma is an important factor that increases risk for experiencing substance use harms. In response to an identified need for training, the Sarnia-Lambton Ontario Health Team hosted four trauma-informed care workshops in early 2025. More than 200 service providers attended, including one two-day session and two half-day refresher sessions. The vast majority of participants reported increased knowledge of how trauma affects individuals, along with improved skills to provide more effective, supportive care.

Drug supply surveillance and community response is the third component of the Emergency Treatment Fund's support which was the purchase of a Drug Analysis Device. Through expertise from Sarnia Police Services, this tool helps to analyze seized substances and provide information about the toxicity of the unregulated drug supply. This tool helps to inform community partners of added risk from the unregulated drug supply in order to reduce threats to the wider community, providing partners the opportunity to be proactive, communicate more clearly about harms, and see trends to improve planning.

Demand Reduction – Progress Snapshot

Demand Reduction takes a health promotion and prevention-focused approach to reducing substance use by addressing its root causes. This Pillar emphasizes preventing or delaying the onset of substance use by strengthening community conditions that build resilience and support healthier lifestyle choices. In 2025, partners dedicated time to focus on youth engagement coming together to share best practices and engage meaningfully. In a recent review of 91 local programs and services, 76 showed strong alignment with at least one demand-related priorities, reflecting a proactive and community-wide approach that exists. Together, these efforts demonstrate a shared commitment to prevention and well-being, as highlighted in the program examples that follow.



Youth Engagement Sub-Committee

In spring 2025, members of the Demand Reduction Pillar identified a common interest in engaging with youth to achieve the Pillar's goal to "improve the community conditions that promote resilience and support healthier alternatives to substance use". Led by County of Lambton Libraries, organizations including Sarnia-Lambton Rebound, Lambton Public Health, St. Clair Catholic District School Board, YWHO, North Lambton Community Health Centre, and Sarnia-Lambton Ontario Health Team developed two goals: seek youth input on how they can be engaged in their community and build capacity of adult community members to understand and participate in youth engagement.

These organizations have been able to leverage best practices within the community to improve upon existing initiatives such as:

- Library Teen Advisory Council
- Youth engagement training for Library Staff
- Youth Board of Directors
- Youth engagement planning day and other youth engagement opportunities



In February 2025, BASES (Bluewater Association for Safety, Environment, and Sustainability) hosted their annual half-day Health & Safety Forum discussing the impact of drugs and alcohol in the region and the ongoing efforts to address it. Health and safety and leadership representatives from local industry, contracting companies, and trade unions came together to hear about the impact that substances can have in the workplace and the value in a non-stigmatizing, safe, and healthy workplace. Lambton Public Health presented about population level data, the work of LDAS, and the resources available both in our community and to health and safety professionals and leaders to foster a healthy workplace. Both BASES and Lambton Public Health continue to work to address stigma in this priority population.



Harm Reduction – Progress Snapshot

Harm Reduction is an approach that aims to minimize the adverse health, social, and economic impacts of substance use by promoting safer practices and supportive services. In 2025, the Pillar convened regularly to share knowledge, identify emerging needs, and strengthen community responses. An analysis of 91 local programs and services found that 64 aligned with at least one harm reduction objective, demonstrating the breadth of this work across sectors. Together, these efforts reflect a coordinated commitment to reducing substance-related harms and are illustrated in the program highlights that follow.



Stigma Ends with Me: The Foundations

Stigma training was delivered by CAPSA, a national non-profit dedicated to dismantling stigma on the substance use continuum and providing peer support resources. Supported by a Sarnia Community Foundation Grant, 235 participants were provided the opportunity to attend a 2-hour session focused on challenging biases and shifting perspectives toward people who use substances. These sessions highlighted the impacts of stigma on individuals and systems. It also provides practical strategies to reduce stigma in professional and everyday contexts, including the use of person-first language to promote respect and dignity. Participants provided positive feedback in that the training was impactful towards their work, highlighting changes they plan to make in their day-to-day practice.





Community Reintegration

Reintegration into community from incarceration, hospital, or another institution is often a difficult transition with limited supports and a high risk for substance use harms. The Harm Reduction Pillar identified that improving the transition to care pathways from institutions could help to reduce harms and improve access to care. To support this work, partners from the Harm Reduction Pillar including CMHA Lambton Kent, County of Lambton Social Services, Bluewater Health, North Lambton Community Health Centre, people with lived experience of substance use, and Lambton Public Health helped to fund, inform, or coordinate the development of a pocket-sized booklets with local services and supports that someone may need as they transition back into community. The booklet included locations for everyday needs, housing supports, health care, substance and mental health services, Indigenous services, and more with artwork by Little Wolf.

Similarly, Sarnia's Community Reintegration and Planning Table (CRPT) supports individuals exiting custody from the Sarnia jail or returning to Sarnia-Lambton after a period of incarceration. Launched in May of 2025, community supports are discussed at bi-weekly round-table meetings, leveraging the expertise and resources of table members to streamline referrals and provide multi-service coordination. This undertaking is a collaboration between Sarnia Adult Probation, the Sarnia Jail, the John Howard Society of Sarnia-Lambton, and over a dozen other Social Services and interest-holders.





Coffee and Kits is a peer engagement program offered by the Outreach Team at North Lambton Community Health Centre. The program brings people together for conversation over coffee, while providing opportunities to support outreach initiatives in the community. Through Coffee and Kits, participants build relationships with staff, connect with services, and share their perspectives to help inform Outreach Team programming.

Participants are compensated for their time and contributions, recognizing the important role that lived and living experience plays in shaping effective services. Since its launch, participation has grown steadily, and Coffee and Kits has become an important part of how the Outreach Team builds and maintains relationships in the community.





Community Sharps Disposal

LDAS Harm Reduction partners have also engaged in collective work to increase opportunities for proper sharps disposal. This included updating the list and map of community sharps disposal bins, developing new communication products to streamline how to properly dispose of found sharps and medication, and adding 2 new community sharps disposal bins and relocating a third at Bluewater Health, Aamjiwnaang First Nation, and Wellington Pharmacy. This is in addition to community partners properly disposing of sharps in community whenever they may be found.

North Lambton Community Health Centre also began research into the feasibility of a peer sharps retrieval initiative based on best practices from other community models. They were successful in receiving a grant from Enbridge to acquire safety equipment for staff. They are excited to begin their initiative in 2026.

Supply Reduction – Progress Snapshot

The Supply Reduction Pillar focuses on enforcing substance-related laws while also improving access to treatment services. Its goal is to support a healthier community by limiting and regulating substances and promoting responsible access. Partners involved bring diverse expertise from areas such as policing, public health, the justice system, pharmacies, primary care, and acute care. In 2025, the Pillar came together to share knowledge and address supply-related issues. In a recent analysis of 91 local programs and services, 55 aligned with a supply-related objective. Together, this work reinforces a coordinated approach to reducing supply and positions the following program highlights as examples of this progress in action.



Suboxone Use by EMS

Lambton Paramedics are now able to provide Suboxone as part of an expanded response to the opioid toxicity crisis. This medication used to treat patients suffering from withdrawal symptoms is now listed within the opioid toxicity and withdrawal medical directive. In 2025, all Lambton EMS paramedics received training to support this initiative, enhancing their ability to provide timely, evidence-based care in the field and improve outcomes for individuals struggling with opioid dependence.



Lifeguard Connect officially launched in Lambton County this past year. Developed by Lifeguard Digital Health, the app is a digital system navigation and harm reduction resource for individuals who use substances. It is designed to help individuals locate nearby services, notify when safety messages have been issued, and alert first responders when an individual using substances alone becomes unresponsive. The app is available online for download.



Detour is a partnership between local public health units and the St. Clair Catholic District School Board (SCCDB). As an alternative-to suspension program, students who are caught using substances on school property are assigned to attend four 50-minute interactive sessions. Topics include increasing awareness and knowledge about health risks of using substances, impacts on the environment, tobacco and vaping marketing trends, coping strategies and stress management, effects of vaping cannabis and cessation support. The program is facilitated by a trained SCCDSB Child and Youth Worker and a Lambton Public Health (LPH) Health Promoter with knowledge of substance use and expertise working with youth.

Looking Forward



2026 Summit

In May 2026, Lambton Public Health hosted the LDAS partners for a full-day summit, the first since the 2023 Prioritization Day. The summit provided an opportunity to reconnect around the shared vision of a flourishing community, working together to prevent and reduce the harms of drug and alcohol use. Guided by the theme of “Seeing the Forest and the Trees”, partners examined the complex ecosystem responding to substance use harms in Lambton County, stepping back to reflect on the impact of their collective work over the past year and to celebrate shared successes and progress.

Summit attendees shared data about the current landscape of substance use outcomes in Lambton, and details about the services that exist to address them. Partners discussed what data is missing and what information would improve our ability to respond as a community, digging deeper into topics of interest such as child, youth, and family supports, alcohol, the unregulated drug supply, and how to share information about substance use. The group identified opportunities for quick wins and where partners could make larger impacts in the system. Looking ahead, LDAS partners have demonstrated a continued commitment to collaboration and innovation to achieve our vision of a flourishing community. In 2026, the partnership aims to build on this collective momentum while advancing new opportunities to create a safer, healthier Lambton.



To stay in the know about our collective work towards the objectives of the Strategy or to contact the partnership visit LambtonDAS.ca.

Steering Committee



- Aamjiwnaang First Nation
- BASES
- Bluewater Health
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Lambton Kent
- Chippewas of Kettle & Stony Point First Nation
- Cultural Services – County of Lambton
- 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 Ontario Health Team
- 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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