

DRUG ADDICTION OFTEN LEADS TO CRIME: FOLEY

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overdose and death."

While an increase in overdoses is one impact drug trafficking can have on a community, it is definitely not the only one.

Foley noted people who become addicted to drugs need to be able to fund this expensive habit.

He said this need for money can lead to an increase in break-ins to homes, businesses and vehicles within the community. Desperate people in search of money and drugs can also turn to human trafficking, Foley said.

When it comes to combating drug trafficking in Halton, Foley said there is no simple solution.

"What I can say is enforcement alone is not the key," he said.

"We honestly believe it

is a mixture or balance between enforcement, intervention strategies and harm reduction."

Foley said Halton police are working with the Halton Region's Health Department, Halton Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Assessment Prevention and Treatment Services, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Reach Out Centre for Kids, local pharmacies and physicians to develop a strategy addressing the issues of illicit use and misuse of opioids in the community.

The Halton detective said educating youth in schools continues to be an important focus and the Halton police Community Partners for Healthy Living program continues to see officers enter elementary schools and high schools and provide drug-

related education to local students.

"If we can educate the youth at a young age then we can hopefully prevent substance abuse as they grow into their late teens and early 20s," said Foley.

In recent months, Halton police have also worked to curb the danger of opioid overdose through messaging campaigns aimed at getting drug users to avoid using alone.

Officers have also worked to encourage someone who witnesses an overdose to not run but call 911, noting Ontario's Good Samaritan Act protects the caller from prosecution.

Other initiatives include raising alerts in the event of:

- a cluster of overdoses (6-12) within a 48-hour time period;
- overdoses and/or drug

seizures featuring counterfeit or contaminated drugs; and

- a cluster of overdoses at a single location (e.g. a school).

Front-line officers have also been carrying naloxone, which reverses the effects of an opioid overdose, for about two years now.

All these measures appear to have had an impact with the number of opioid-related deaths in Halton dropping dramatically from 44 in 2018 to just 15 between January and September of 2019.

Police are not the only ones with a perspective on how to combat dangerous drugs and drug trafficking in Halton.

Mikaela (last name withheld) of the Oakville youth support group Resiliency 4 Recovery (R4R) also weighed in, noting that

while education is an important part of reducing drug use, a better approach would be for the youths to hear from someone closer to their own age who has experienced drug addiction and can communicate the impact it had on their life.

Mikaela struggled with opioid addiction for years after her boyfriend introduced her to drugs at age 16.

She was eventually able to kick her habit, but not before she was kicked out of her family home for stealing.

The boyfriend who introduced her to opioids died of an overdose.

"I also think legislation around more safe injection sites and legalization of all drugs could make a significant difference," said Mikaela.

"Fentanyl has been and continues to be a fatal drug

that is killing many people. A lot of the time people don't even know it is in their drug supply. If a safe supply of opiates were available for people struggling, it could prevent a lot of overdoses."

Foley noted the legalization of marijuana has yet to eliminate the black market for that drug in Halton but he acknowledged it did decrease the size of that market. He also noted that drug arrests in Halton went down dramatically from 717 in 2018 to 209 in 2019, something Foley said is directly related to the implementation of new cannabis legislation. Foley would not comment on the pros or cons of legalizing other drugs.

Mikaela argued the problem of drug addiction needs to be treated as a health problem rather than a legal one.



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