



lumenus
Community Services

Harm Reduction 101



Prepared for Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario

Land Acknowledgment

Agenda

- What is Harm Reduction?
 - Harm Reduction Principles
 - Addressing Myths
 - Harm Reduction & Youth
 - Theory to Practice
-

**What values do you
incorporate into your
work/hub?**

Substance Use & Mental Health

- 40-60% of people with mental health challenges will also engage in substance use
- Stigma continues to be a significant barrier for people who use substances to access mental health services
- Many mental health professionals are not trained to support people who use substances- especially those who do not identify as having a problem with their use

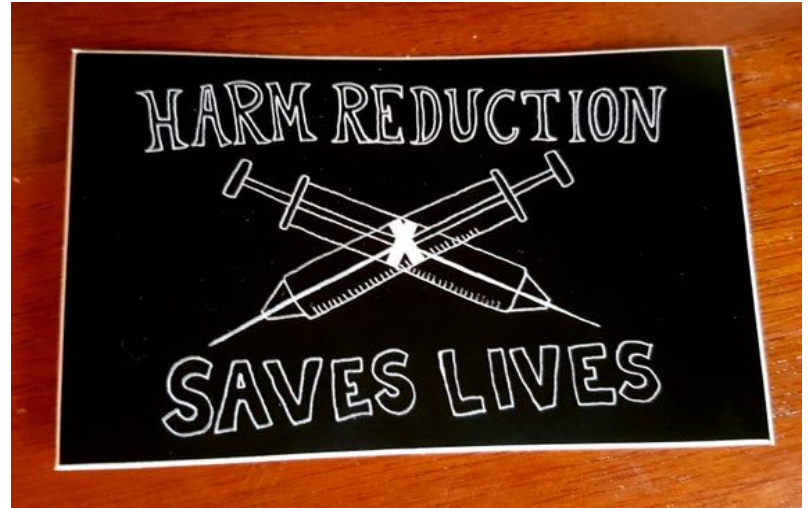
**What comes to mind when
you think of harm
reduction?**

What is Harm Reduction?

- Evidence-based and client-centered approach that seeks to reduce health and social harms associated with substance use
- A philosophy and series of values
- Acknowledges that abstinence is not always the end goal
- “Meets people where they’re at”

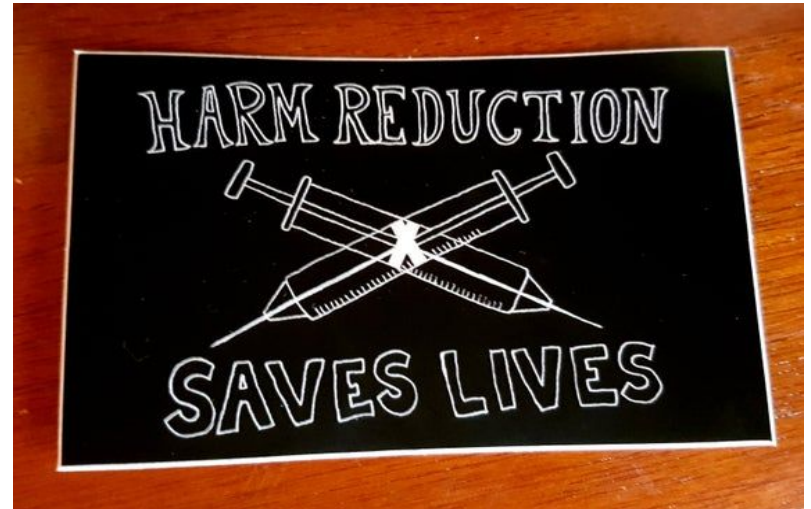
Principles of Harm Reduction:

1. Emphasizes the values, dignities and rights of all individuals
2. Views behaviour on a continuum, recognizing that some put people at greater risk of harm than others
3. Informed by, centered around and driven by people with lived experience
4. Recognizes people's rights to information



Principles of Harm Reduction:

5. Acknowledges that individuals receiving services are the ones who can best judge the success of programs, policies and services
6. Respects autonomy and is non-coercive
7. Understands that risks and harms are magnified by structural and systemic conditions including, colonialism, racism, unstable housing, poverty etc.



Harm Reduction Myths

Harm reduction excludes abstinence

- Harm reduction reflects a continuum of behaviours with one end being abstinence
 - The difference between harm reduction and abstinence approaches is that harm reduction does not insist on abstinence as the end goal
-

Harm reduction enables substance use

- Harm reduction does not encourage substance use, but recognizes it as a reality for many people
 - Harm reduction believes in meeting people where they are at and acknowledges that many people do not want to stop using
-

Providing harm reduction supplies increases likelihood of drug use

- There is no evidence to support this myth
 - Providing harm reduction supplies minimizes risks and increases access to additional health services
-

Harm reduction is only useful for people who use substances

- Harm reduction principles and values overlap and coincide with many clinical approaches to person-centered care
 - Harm reduction practices can be applied to many risk behaviours including sex, self-harm, gambling etc.
-

Harm Reduction & Youth

“Young people aged 15 to 24 have been shown to be more likely to experience mental health and/or substance use challenges than any other age group.”

Why Harm Reduction and Youth?

- For many young people, engaging in substance use is part of life.
- Ignoring use or only focusing on prevention puts young people at greater risk of harm.
- Young people have the capacity to make decisions about their health when provided with the skills and information to do so.
- The ability to support informed decision-making and critical thinking skills is central to implementing harm reduction with youth clients.

**What may get in the way of
providing harm reduction
support?**

“The youth we work with don’t use substances”

The 2019 Ontario Student Drug Use and Mental Health Survey showed that:

- 41.7 % of young people reported using alcohol
- 22 % of young people reported using cannabis

The majority of youth who use substances who access mental health services, do not disclose their substance use to their counsellor.

Through internal focus groups and anonymous surveys, we learned that:

- 10% felt comfortable speaking to their counsellor about substance use
- 14% would be comfortable speaking about substance use with a nurse/doctor

“The youth we work with don’t use substances”

We learned that many youth choose not to disclose substance use because:

- 53% stated that they were afraid staff would focus their work together on their substance use
- 29% believed that they will be judged by their counsellor
- 33% worried that what they share won’t be kept private
- 26% shared that they didn’t know how to start the conversation

“We have addiction support. Why do we also need harm reduction?”

- Many youth who use substances don't identify as having an addiction.
- Addiction focused language may alienate young people who may not identify the need for addiction support or feel uncomfortable talking to an “addiction support worker”.
- 26% of the youth we engaged with worried that they would be forced to go to rehab/detox or substance use treatment

Youth shared that they would feel more comfortable if staff:

- Had a non-judgmental attitude towards substance use (66%)
- Let me decide if and how I want to be helped around substance use (40%)
- Have staff knowledgeable about substance use (40%)
- Offer peer support with young people with shared experience around substance use (40%)
- Don't make a big deal about substance use (33%)
- Staff help me understand the rules around privacy and confidentiality (26%)

Theory to Practice



How might you provide
practical **harm reduction**
support to youth?

Theory to Practice

- Create space for nuanced discussions about substance use
- Support staff to work with youth and their family members/guardians/siblings (if/when applicable)
- Provide harm reduction education so that youth are able to make informed choices about their substance use
- Invite youth to define what “substance use support” looks like for them- if anything at all

Theory to Practice

- Be transparent about policies, mandates, and limitations which may impact substance use support
 - Think critically about how existing agency structures may impact youth who use substances
- Know that young people will always be the experts of their own care

Key Takeaways

- Harm reduction is a philosophy, a values set, **and** practical strategies
- Substance use is a reality for many young people, including those who access your services
- Harm reduction promotes critical thinking, information sharing, the right to safety, and autonomy not substance use itself
- Taking a harm reduction approach to care promotes young people's agency

Please complete our evaluation!

www.surveymonkey.com/r/yhowebinar1

Next webinar:

Spectrum of Harm Reduction

Wednesday December 9th 2020

11:00am–12:30pm

Thank you!

If you have any questions, please reach out to Jordana
at jrovet@lumenus.ca