An integrated community-university research approach to responding to critical social issues in the Guelph community

Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy (WGDS)

The WGDS is a coalition of over 30 partner agencies and members of the lived experience community, who are working to implement a 4-Pillars drug strategy in the municipalities of Wellington County and the City of Guelph.

“Working collaboratively to reduce the impacts and harms of substance misuse in Guelph and Wellington County.”

4-Pillar Drug Strategies

The Four Pillar model—Prevention, Treatment, Harm Reduction, and Enforcement—is a framework for an evidence-based approach to addressing issues of concern around addictions and finding effective strategies for reducing the impacts of substance misuse.

Integrated Partnership: WGDS and the Research Shop

Evidence based policy decisions and implementing policy into evidence based practice requires research. Beginning in summer 2010, the WGDS has partnered with the Research Shop at the University of Guelph, engaging graduate student interns to provide support in the form of policy briefs, literature scans, and “rapid response” research.

The research produced from this partnership ranges from examining Housing First programs and withdrawal management practices in the area, to exploring existing policies around needle-exchange programs and youth prevention efforts.

The partnership has also produced links to the University of Guelph curriculum at both the graduate and undergraduate levels:

- Throughout October and November 2011, the Drug Strategy connected with a 3rd year Corrections and Penology course to offer a series of community sessions on the Four Pillar model, bringing together multiple representatives from drug treatment organizations, police services, people with lived experience, Public Health, and the Guelph CHC, to name a few.
- In turn, 18 student-prepared literature reviews on youth substance misuse prevention programs were compiled by a research shop intern into an evidence-based policy brief.

Michael Matte, Lived Experience Member; Estera Brudek, Sanguen Social Services Worker; Tom Hammond, Executive Director at AIDS Committee of Guelph and Wellington County; and Adam Rutherford, Youth Services Coordinator at City of Guelph, speaking on Harm Reduction approaches to responding to substance misuse in a community context.

Ernesto Marzola, Physician’s Assistant with the Community Based Psychiatry program at the Guelph CHC and Inspector Scott Smith, Commanding Officer of the Wellington County OPP, speaking on prevention approaches to substance misuse.

Rapidly changing contexts shape the research questions posed by the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy

Quickly changing contexts require “just in time” research. Research Shop interns and staff work with the Wellington Drug Guelph Strategy manager or committee members to iteratively refine research questions as contexts and timelines change.

According to WGDS manager Raechelle Devereaux, a key benefit of partnership with the Research Shop is access to objective, unbiased research to inform policy and decisions on what can be politically charged issues.

In turn, access to research evidence prompts or reinforces strategic directions for projects and service delivery, and informs policy development.