



HARM REDUCTION AND SEXUAL HEALTH POPULATION HEALTH



Interior Health

Youth Harm Reduction Program (Y-HR)

Harm reduction is an approach to providing care and support that is based in respect, compassion and inclusion. A harm reduction approach includes programs, policies and practices that aim to reduce the negative consequences associated with behaviors that are often considered high risk, like substance use and some sexual practices.

Why a harm reduction approach for youth?

Youth vary in their experience with substance use, their needs and readiness to change. While abstinence-based programs may be effective for some, they do not meet the needs of all youth. [Research](#) shows that youth perceive harm reduction approaches as more helpful and practical than approaches that focus exclusively on not using substances. Harm reduction approaches do not encourage youth to use substances – they present the real risks of using substances while also providing information on how to reduce risks if using substances.

Our beliefs

The work of the Y-HR Program is guided by a pragmatic approach to youth substance use; what we like to call being **REAL**. The beliefs that guide our work include:

Risk reduction: Open, honest, fact-based discussions about substance use without fear of punishment, shame or stigma are essential to prevent substance use related harms among youth.

Education: Substance use education programs for youth should be based on evidence and facts.

Access: Youth should be able to access the full range of harm reduction services that are available to adults in spaces where they feel safe and comfortable.

Lived experience: We value the voices and experiences of youth who have lived-experience with substance use. Their input and involvement is essential to the work we do. Trauma informed practice and cultural safety principles should be at the core of everything we do.

What does the Y-HR Team do?

The team works with the people and systems that provide services to youth. This includes Interior Health staff, community and government agencies, and schools. By building capacity and skills, we aim to create more safe spaces where youth can talk openly about substances, access needed services and ultimately reduce substance use related harms. The team provides a number of services including:

- Training for service providers who work with youth.
- Substance use policy consultations
- Consultation on substance use education approaches, program recommendations and resources.
- Facilitate youth access to harm reduction services and supplies including naloxone programs, safer sex and safer substance use supplies, and drug checking services.

How to reach us? Its easy! Just send an email to harmreduction.coordinator@interiorhealth.ca and ask to be connected with the Youth Harm Reduction Team.

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