

Draft: Harm Reduction Policy

LONG TITLE	Integrated Harm Reduction and Substance Use Policy	DATE OF ENACTMENT	XX MONTH 2025
		LAST AMENDED	XX MONTH 2025
REFERENCE No.	E-XX	NEXT REVIEW	MONTH 2027
CATEGORY	Stances, Equity, and Advocacy	COMPETENT CHAMBER	Council

PREAMBLE

CUSA is committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all students. This policy outlines strategies to minimize the negative consequences associated with substance use, overdose, and poly-substance use, while promoting the health, dignity, and autonomy of students.

INTERPRETATION

Short Title

1 This Policy shall be called the *Harm Reduction Policy* as an optional short-form title.

Review Timeline

2 This Policy shall be reviewed every 2 (two) years by the University Affairs Committee.

Definitions

3 In this Policy, the following definitions shall apply:

“Harm Reduction”, this policy adopts the Harm Reduction International definition as follows: Policies, programmes and practices that aim to minimise the negative health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies and drug laws.¹

“Substance Use” can refer to the consumption or application of any substance that can affect a person's physical or mental state; ranging from occasional, non-harmful use to harmful patterns of use. Examples include the use of alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, and prescription medications.

“Overdose Prevention”, this policy adopts the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) definition as follows: Strategies which seek to mitigate and prevent when

¹Harm Reduction International. “Who we are: What is harm reduction?”, HRI, 2025.
<https://hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction/>

someone takes one or more substances in a quantity or combination that exceeds what their body can handle.²

“Naloxone”, this policy adopts the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) definition as follows: medication, commonly administered through kits, that can temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose and allow time for medical help to arrive.³

“Stigma”, in the context of harm reduction, refers to the shame or public discomfort associated with the circumstances around substance use, or the individuals using said substances.

“Peer Support”, this policy adopts the Alberta Caregiver College definition as follows: a form of support where individuals who share a common experience provide emotional and practical support to one another. This type of support is different from professional support because it comes from someone who has been through a similar experience and can understand the challenges and feelings that come with it.⁴

“Sober Spaces” or “Sober-inclusive Spaces” refers to venues, activities, and environments designed to be inclusive and welcoming to those who abstain from certain substances.

“Safe Consumption Sites” or “Supervised Consumption Sites”, this policy adopts the Health Canada definition as follows: places that provide a safe, clean space for people to bring their own drugs to use in the presence of trained staff.⁵

- 4 This policy applies to all CUSA spaces including but not limited to: office spaces, businesses, service centres, events, and to all CUSA staff including but not limited to: executive, full-time, and part-time.

MANDATE

² Canadian Mental Health Association. “Overdose Prevention”, CMHA, 2018.

<https://cmha.ca/brochure/overdose-prevention/>

³ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. “Naloxone: Overview,” CAMH, 2025.

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/naloxone>

⁴ Alberta Caregiver College. “Understanding Peer Support: Definition and Purpose,” Alberta Health Services, 2023.

<https://caregivercollege.ca/mod/page/view.php?id=368#:~:text=Peer%20support%20is%20a%20form,feelings%20that%20come%20with%20it>

⁵ Health Canada. “Supervised Consumption Sites Dashboard,” Government of Canada, 2025.

<https://health-infobase.canada.ca/supervised-consumption-sites/>

5 CUSA recognizes the steady rate of suspected overdose-related ED visits and deaths in the City of Ottawa, and the impacts rising rates of substance abuse, particularly with regard to opioids, have on students.⁶

6 CUSA acknowledges its duty to engage in public advocacy on behalf of Carleton undergraduate students with regard to harm reduction strategies at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government.

7 CUSA recognizes that students who use drugs, alcohol, or other substances deserve support rather than judgment or ostracization. CUSA therefore adopts a zero-tolerance approach to punitive drug enforcement techniques.

8 CUSA acknowledges that the principles of harm reduction are rooted in social justice, the bodily autonomy of the person, and evidence-based public health practices.

9 CUSA recognizes that it has a responsibility to provide sober-inclusive spaces, peer support programs, and environments free from the stigma that often comes with substance use.

POLICY ADMINISTRATION

10 The President and Director of Operations have the responsibility of administering harm reduction practices in both the work environment and on campus. They are responsible for following the procedures and strategies outlined in this policy.

11 The Vice President, Student Life has the responsibility of administering this policy with respect to CUSA events, volunteers, and programming.

12 The Vice President, Student issues has the responsibility of administering this policy with respect to CUSA's university and governmental advocacy efforts.

ACTIONS

Events and Student Programming

13 CUSA will actively work to provide accurate, accessible information on alcohol, cannabis, stimulants, opioids, and other substances, and ensure that information is available in a timely manner prior to large-scale events.

14 CUSA will actively encourage "Party Safe" language in all of its communications regarding events and programming.

15 CUSA will make an effort to host regular harm reduction and wellness workshops with a particular focus on the effects of substance use.

16 CUSA will create and promote certain events as "Sober events" and "Sober-inclusive spaces" as part of its annual programming.

⁶ Ottawa Public Health. "Ottawa's Overdose Overview," OPH, 2025.

<https://open.ottawa.ca/datasets/ottawa::confirmed-opioid-related-deaths-of-ottawa-residents-/explore>

Operations

17 Volunteers at CUSA events, and CUSA staff, shall be offered the following trainings where applicable:

- a) Naloxone kit training;
- b) Mental Health First Aid;⁷
- c) Consent and active by-stander training; and
- d) De-escalation workshops.

18 Naloxone kits will be readily available in CUSA's public spaces, including but not limited to its businesses, service centres, and main office.

Advocacy and Endorsements

19 CUSA will publicly endorse the broad drug policy reform aims advocated by Amnesty International, including;

- a) Decriminalizing the use, possession cultivation, and purchase of all drugs for personal use.
- b) Expand evidence-based prevention, harm reduction and treatment programmes and address the root causes that may increase the risks of using drugs;
- c) Regain control and reduce violence by moving towards the effective regulation of drugs, based on a scientific and evidence-based assessment of the risks and harms of each drug;
- d) Move away from punishing and stigmatizing people who use drugs and instead adopt laws and policies focused on protecting health and human rights; and
- e) Put in place measures that tackle social inequalities and promote social justice, including a wide set of gender-sensitive and holistic socio-economic protection measures tackling the different stages of substance abuse.⁸

20 CUSA will endorse the four (4) key aims of the One Step Forward Alliance in Ontario, including;

- a) Establishing a cross-ministry Emergency Task Force to address the severity of the addictions crisis;
- b) Launch and fund a remote drug treatment access program;
- c) Reform current compensation and funding models to addictions care; and

⁷ Mental Health Commission of Canada. "What is Mental Health First Aid?,"MHCC, 2025.
<https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/what-we-do/mental-health-first-aid/>

⁸ Amnesty International. "What We Do: Drug Policy Reform," Amnesty International, 2025.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/drug-policy-reform/>

d) Empower pharmacists to take a greater role in treating those suffering from addictions.⁹

21 CUSA will endorse the recommendation of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), for the federal government to create a new fund for student mental health that will support the hiring of new mental health care counsellors, improve wait times for services, increase access overall and enable targeted supports to Black and racialized students at post-secondary institutions across Canada.¹⁰

22 CUSA will oppose any efforts by the provincial government to close or limit access to supervised consumption sites.

Institutional Recommendations

23 CUSA will advocate that Housing and Residence Life provide free and easily accessible naloxone kits and naloxone use training to all of its Residence Fellows (RFs).

24 CUSA recommends that Carleton University scale-up existing substance use awareness training, programs, and campaigns, particularly during fall orientation and academic onboarding.

25 CUSA will recommend that Carleton University consider a formal partnership between Carleton Wellness, CUSA, and Ottawa Public Health as it relates to substance use awareness and “Party Safe” practices.

26 CUSA will advocate that Carleton University allocate resources to, and adopt a formal system for tracking unreported overdoses or substance-related incidents to improve early intervention opportunities.

LIMITATIONS

27 While CUSA is committed to supporting students through harm reduction best practices, this policy does not replace legal, medical, or institutional protocols mandated by Carleton University or the Province of Ontario.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER POLICIES

28 This aligns with other CUSA & Campus policies, including Existing Policies under Reference Letter E (Stances, Equity, and Advocacy).

⁹ One Step Forward Alliance. “Our Recommendations,” Alliance for Advancing Recovery, 2024. <https://www.onestepforward.ca/>

¹⁰ Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. “The New Abnormal: Student Mental Health Two Years into COVID-19,” CASA, 2022. https://assets.nationbuilder.com/casaacae/pages/3470/attachments/original/1664377984/Abacus_Report_2022_%281%29.pdf?1664377984