

# Working to Improve Neighbourhood Safety (WINS) Program Evaluation

Executive Summary  
2021-2022



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
PARAMEDIC SERVICES

**A full version of this report is available upon request.**

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## Executive Summary

Unsafe disposal of used harm reduction supplies in the community poses a risk for public safety and contributes to public concern and stigma around substance use. Strategies to encourage proper disposal of harm reduction supplies are an important component of a comprehensive community response to substance use.

The Working to Improve Neighbourhood Safety (WINS) program is a peer-based needle recovery and harm reduction outreach program. The WINS program is a partnership between Sanguen Health Centre, Region of Waterloo Public Health, and local Municipalities. The WINS program was initially piloted in the City of Cambridge from 2018 to 2019 ([see pilot evaluation here](#)). Regional Council decided to expand the program to the City of Waterloo and City of Kitchener in 2020 ([see decision by Regional Council here](#)). Region of Waterloo Public Health contracted Sanguen Health Centre to operate the program.

In 2022, a mixed methods evaluation was conducted to determine whether the program was meeting its objectives, which were to:

- Reduce the number of discarded needles in the community
- Increase meaningful employment opportunities for people with barriers to traditional employment
- Provide education to people who use substances of proper disposal options, when opportunities exist
- Create a positive community response and increase community engagement related to harm reduction and substance use

The program data, surveys, and key informant interviews that informed the evaluation findings provided valuable information regarding the WINS program, including the strengths and challenges experienced by the program. Key findings from the evaluation include:

- The program is continuing to meet the need for proactive clean up of used harm reduction supplies in the community, collecting 2,028 needles and 431 litres of used supplies across Waterloo Region on average each month.
- The core of the program is the lived experience and knowledge that the Peer Workers bring to the program.
  - The WINS Peer Workers do more than clean up the community. They are also a trusted source of information and support for individuals in the community that use substances. The Peers distributed an average of 690 harm reduction supplies and 28 disposal containers each month in the community. They also

recorded an average of over 340 outreach interactions and 45 referrals to community services each month.

- The Peer Workers are aware of changing substance use trends in the community and can identify areas in the community to prioritize for clean up.
- The Peer Workers engage the community as part of their role to help shift the community's perceptions around harm reduction and substance use. This contributes to reducing stigma in the community. The Peer Workers report an average of 314 interactions with community members on their routes each month.
- The program continues to provide meaningful, low barrier, paid employment for individuals in the community who have lived or living experience with substance use. The WINS program employed 73 Peer Workers from January 2021 to December 2022. The employment opportunity garnered enough interest that the program has a wait list of individuals interested in the role.
- Sanguen Health Centre is a trusted organization in the community that has the expertise to support individuals with lived experience in their role as Peer Workers.
- Despite finding that the public is supportive of this work in the community, there is low awareness of the program and the work WINS does in Waterloo Region.

The findings support the continuation of the program in Waterloo Region. The following recommendations to improve the program were informed by the evaluation findings.

- Continue to offer the WINS program across Waterloo Region
- Increase awareness of the WINS program within the community
- Improve program data collection and tracking
- Support continued learning and development opportunities for Peer Workers
- Continue to expand the routes to meet the needs of other community areas