

Harm Reduction Statement

Preamble:

Activities such as substance use, drug distribution, sex, and sex work occur in society. A harm reduction approach recognizes this and works to reduce the risks associated with these activities as well as to address the societal and structural issues that cause individuals to seek unsafe activities for recreation, or means for monetary gain and/or as coping mechanisms. We also recognize that vulnerable individuals including children are targeted to participate in unsafe activities such as drug distribution and sex work. At LAMP and EMCHC we understand that these activities stem from an inequitable society that marginalizes certain populations, including people of colour, people living in poverty, people living with mental health concerns, newcomers, youth, and people with deficiencies of social determinants of health. As part of LAMP's and EMCHC's health promotion philosophy and anti-oppressive work, we recognize these forms of oppression and work to eliminate them.

Definition of Harm Reduction:

Harm reduction practices are dedicated to reducing the social, health, and economic harms associated with activities such as substance use, drug distribution, sex and sex work. Harm reduction commits to meeting people where they are to reduce the risk of infections, communicable diseases, overdose, and violence.

A harm reduction perspective recognizes that activities associated with substance use, drug distribution, sex, and sex work are invariable parts of society and is recognized in the South Etobicoke community and East Mississauga community. An abstinence approach does not meet the needs of everyone. A wider spectrum of harm reduction services that involves minimizing risks is crucial. Abstinence is not a prerequisite. These services include the distribution of safer drug supplies, harm reduction counselling, support, education, and referrals to specialized services such as mental health services, primary health care services, methadone clinics, withdrawal management services etc.

Harm reduction uses a client centered approach, recognizing the individual as an expert of their own experiences, engaging clients to develop personal strategies to reduce harms that promote safer substance use, safer sex, and safer sex work.

Harm reduction strives to create an environment that fosters support and acceptance where each person is treated with respect and dignity. We practice compassion, non-judgement, and anti-oppressive principles that help fight the stigma and marginalization that accompanies mental health and substance use issues. Furthermore, it serves as a vehicle to connect clients who have been marginalized from the larger societal context and promotes inclusion.

Harm reduction relies heavily on evidence informed practice and public health grounded research coupled with the expertise gained through individuals' lived experience and creates opportunities to engage clients to share their knowledge, inform service, and program planning as well as become involved in peer outreach programs.

Definition of Sex Work:

Sex work is the exchange of sexual services, regularly or occasionally, in exchange for money, housing, food, substances, protection, debt repayment, or other monetary items or services.

Sex work is based on a consumerist market of supply and demand. Women are particularly prevalent in sex work due to the commodification of women's bodies. However, men, children, and individuals who don't identify with traditional gender binaries are also involved in sex work.

In the Lakeshore community, sex work is conducted on the street, in private dwellings, in massage parlours, in bawdy houses, through escort services and in strip clubs. Sex workers are at an increased risk of STI's, violence, robbery, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking (domestically or internationally).

We recognize that issues such as poverty, lack of education, internalized oppression, unstable family life and limited social supports increases the vulnerability of individuals to partake in sex work.

LAMP and EMCHC endeavours to create a safe environment free of stigma to allow sex workers to access LAMP and EMCHC services. Services may include primary health care, harm reduction, counselling, settlement services, pre-natal services, advocacy work, court support, and referrals to specialized services such as trauma counselling and police services.

Guiding Principles:

We recognize that people are experts of their own lives and essential to creating individualized harm reduction plans tailored to meet their needs. Abstinence is not a prerequisite.

Choice:

At LAMP and EMCHC we support members of the communities we serve to make empowered choices about improving their health and reducing risk. LAMP and EMCHC is committed to serving at risk populations in a respectful, non-judgemental manner, including individuals who use or distribute substances or are involved in sex work.

Access:

LAMP and EMCHC recognizes that substance use may act as a barrier to accessing services and keeping appointments. However, we will strive to develop strategies to engage with clients and maintain engagement in order to provide a continuity of service.

Education:

Education is a vital tool in helping fight the stigma that surrounds drug use and sex work and the risks associated with each. LAMP and EMCHC will strive to reduce the stigma around the risks associated with substance use, sex work, STI's, HIV, and Hep C.

LAMP and EMCHC will strive to equip our clients with knowledge of best practices in harm reduction. This respects the clients' ability to make decisions and create personalized harm reduction plans that lead to minimizing risks and consequences. We also place a high value on learning from our clients and creating opportunities for their expertise to be shared.

Safer Behaviour:

The main objective of harm reduction is to mitigate the potential dangers and health risks associated with risky behaviours for individuals and the community.

System Change:

LAMP and EMCHC will advocate to reduce the stigma associated with substance use, drug distribution, and sex work. We will support community members including people with mental health concerns,

people who use substances, and people involved in sex work. LAMP and EMCHC commits to participating in partnerships that reduce stigma and promote the harm reduction philosophy. LAMP and EMCHC will advocate for change in policies that promote safety and dignity and reflect the evidence informed practices of harm reduction that both benefit the clients as well as reduce harm in the community.

Scope

This harm reduction philosophy and practice applies to everyone at LAMP and EMCHC including staff, managers, students, and volunteers. Although harm reduction is everyone's responsibility, there are also specific roles within LAMP that support this work. If you have a question or want to learn more about how to work from a harm reduction perspective please contact:

Sarah Greig, Co-ordinator of Harm Reduction Services x287
Bill Worrell, Director of Healthy Communities x227