

HARM REDUCTION CONFERENCE 2026

Connection in Practice

NOVEMBER 10

9 AM–4:30 PM EST

SUPERIOR INN, THUNDER BAY

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

THUNDER BAY Drug Strategy

Thunder Bay District Health Unit

HARM REDUCTION CONFERENCE 2026

Connection in Practice

Tuesday, November 10 - Superior Inn

9:00 am - 9:30 am	Land Acknowledgement Opening Prayer Welcome Address Opening Remarks	Kandace Belanger Elder Sam Achneepineskum Dr. Greg Holzman MC Kari Chiappetta
9:30 am - 10:30 am	When Care and Constraint Collide: Staying Human in Harm Reduction Work	Dr. Marcus Greatheart
10:30 am - 10:45 am	Break	
10:45 am - 12:00 pm	Workshop Session #1 *Attendees will participate in their first pre-selected workshop.*	
	Connecting Through Story: Digital Storytelling and Participant Voice in Harm Reduction Dr. Abigale Sprakes	
	Harm Reduction Supplies: Strengthening Communities Through Innovative Knowledge Exchange Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program	
	Drug Checking: Expanding Access Through a Mobile Harm Reduction Van NorWest Community Health Centres	
	Shaping the Future of the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy Thunder Bay Drug Strategy	
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm - 1:45 pm	Changing the Picture: Rethinking Drug Education	MC Kari Chiappetta
1:45 pm - 3:00 pm	Workshop Session #2 *Workshops repeat. Attendees will participate in their second pre-selected workshop.*	
3:00 pm - 3:15 pm	Break	
3:15 pm - 4:15 pm	Connection in Practice: Panel Discussion	Bonnie Aggamway, Rene Boucher, May Fianna and Rav Ramheera
4:15 pm - 4:30 pm	Closing Remarks Closing Prayer	Rachel Globensky Elder Sam Achneepineskum

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Tuesday, November 10 | 9:00 am - 4:30 pm EST

Biographies and Session Summaries

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYER

Elder Sam Achneepineskum



Elder Sam Achneepineskum is originally from Marten Falls First Nation. Throughout his life he has learned from living in the bush. Living in this way has given him a distinct perspective on life and its issues. Sam has gained knowledge and experience by being involved with issues that affect First Nation lives. Sam has been involved with the City of Thunder Bay and has worked previously as the Aboriginal Liaison with the City.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Kari Chiappetta



As an emcee and workshop facilitator, **Kari Chiappetta's** authentic and engaging personality enables her to connect with audiences on a personal level. She is known for her high-energy presentations and her ability to keep audiences engaged and entertained throughout her speeches. Her use of humour, personal anecdotes, and interactive exercises helps to create a positive and dynamic atmosphere, making her presentations memorable and impactful.

Connection in Practice



KEYNOTE PRESENTER

Dr. Marcus Greatheart

When Care and Constraint Collide: Staying Human in Harm Reduction Work

9:30 am - 10:30 am

SESSION SUMMARY

Harm reduction work often happens in conditions of scarcity, crisis and mistrust. This session explores how frontline workers can maintain connection, dignity and effectiveness when the work is emotionally demanding and the system around them is constrained. Drawing on practical lessons from low-barrier care, addiction medicine and The Field Guide to Frontline Care, this session offers a grounded framework for staying human under pressure while supporting people living with homelessness, substance use and instability.

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Marcus Greatheart is a family physician and registered social worker based on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. His work focuses on low-barrier primary care, addiction medicine, street medicine and care for people living with homelessness, substance use and mental health challenges. Marcus serves as Medical Lead for Addiction Medicine and Substance Use for Central and North Vancouver Island.

He is also an educator, speaker and author whose work helps frontline teams stay effective, humane and connected while working inside systems shaped by scarcity, crisis and social inequity. His forthcoming book, The Field Guide to Frontline Care, offers practical tools for workers supporting people living under conditions of homelessness, substance use and instability.

His writing and teaching focus on harm reduction, trauma-informed practice, Indigenous health, moral distress, compassion fatigue and the everyday skills that help care teams sustain their humanity under pressure.

Connection in Practice

WORKSHOP #1

Connecting Through Story: Digital Storytelling and Participant Voice in Harm Reduction

10:45 am - 12:00 pm and 1:45 pm - 3:00 pm

SESSION SUMMARY

Safer Supply Programs (SSPs) across Canada have been shown to reduce overdoses and save lives among people using unregulated, toxic opioids. Yet strong evidence, including government data on overdoses, emergency department visits, and fatalities, was not enough to move decision-makers to scale up SSPs and supervised consumption sites.

As these programs closed, participants enrolled in one SSP wanted to add their voices and stories to the data, making the statistics come to life. This workshop shares those stories and introduces Digital Storytelling (DST) as a practice for centring participant voices in harm reduction work.

FACILITATOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Abigale Sprakes (she/her) is a Community-Based Researcher and Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Lakehead University. She lives on the traditional lands of Fort William First Nation, where her research focuses on the opioid epidemic, harm reduction, and health equity. With 30 years of experience in the substance use and mental health field, Abi collaborates with individuals with living experience to promote evidence- and rights-based substance use health practices and policies.



Connection in Practice

WORKSHOP #2

Harm Reduction Supplies: Strengthening Communities Through Innovative Knowledge Exchange

10:45 am - 12:00 pm and 1:45 pm - 3:00 pm

SESSION SUMMARY

This collaborative workshop was co-designed with the Peer Mobile Outreach Program at Sanguen Health Centre in Guelph and the Knowledge Translation Team at the Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program. Through innovative knowledge exchange strategies, the session revisits essential safer-use practices in ways designed to resonate with harm reduction programs.

Participants will explore a variety of approaches to sharing safer-use information with people who use substances. Following safer practices can help reduce the risk of blood-borne viruses, infections and overdoses while promoting well-being and healthier communities.

OHRDP

SANGUEN

Connection in Practice

WORKSHOP #2 - CONTINUED

ABOUT ONTARIO HARM REDUCTION DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM (OHRDP)

Since 2006, the **Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program** has been coordinating the distribution of evidence-based harm reduction supplies to Core Harm Reduction Programs throughout Ontario. Funded through the HIV & Hepatitis C Programs of the Ontario Ministry of Health, we are a not-for-profit program of the Kingston Community Health Centres. Working with a licensed medical distributor, OHRDP coordinates the procurement, management and distribution of harm reduction supplies.

The supplies provided through OHRDP complement condoms and biohazard containers provided through Ontario Public Health. In addition, OHRDP provides Core Harm Reduction Programs with educational materials that support both the safer-use of supplies and recommended inventory management practices. Harm reduction provides strategies and ideas to minimize harmful consequences associated with drug use and other health risks.

Harm reduction respects the rights of an individual to choose, and addresses the inequities of health and well-being in the drug using community. Central to this approach is the prevention of HIV and hepatitis C through access to safer-use supplies, education, and community-based interventions that meet people where they are. OHRDP values the expertise of the community it serves. We partner with other provincial harm reduction programs so that together we can exchange the most current knowledge, skills, and approaches.

OHRDP

SANGUEN

Connection in Practice

WORKSHOP #2 - CONTINUED

FACILITATOR BIOGRAPHIES



Stephanie Beaumont has been dedicated to harm reduction outreach, education, and community-based support since 2014. She joined the Sanguen Health Centre team in 2016 and has played an active role in developing and coordinating harm reduction services throughout Guelph and Wellington County.

Steph helped design Guelph's Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) site in partnership with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health and served as a consultant in the development of the local safe supply program. She has the unique experience of having worked both the first and last day of the Guelph CTS.

Today, Steph coordinates regional harm reduction programs and education initiatives and leads a peer team of staff with lived and living experience of drug use and outdoor sheltering. She also oversees the Guelph Community Van outreach program, which serves six rural communities.

Steph works closely with the Guelph Drug Strategy, Public Health, Guelph Community Health Centre, outreach nurses, midwives, legal aid and other community partners. At the heart of Steph's work is a belief in connection, community, and collective care. Outside of work, she enjoys exploring mosses, lichens, mycelial networks, and sharing life with cats.

OHRDP

SANGUEN

Connection in Practice

WORKSHOP #2 - CONTINUED

FACILITATOR BIOGRAPHIES



Meghanne Hicks, RN, BScN, has 17 years of nursing experience and has worked in a variety of healthcare settings including emergency care, acute care, community mental health and addictions, and harm reduction services. Her diverse clinical background has shaped her commitment to person-centred, compassionate, and evidence-informed care.

As a Knowledge Mobilizer, Meghanne develops educational resources and training focused on harm reduction supplies and safer harm reduction practices. She has completed the Knowledge Translation Professional Certificate (KTPC™) and serves as a trainer in De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations (DPVS).

Meghanne is passionate about sharing knowledge, building understanding, and helping others apply safer practice principles that support both individual well-being and healthier communities.



Denise Beaumont has more than 30 years of professional experience as a Recreation Therapy Specialist, working across a diverse range of settings, including hospitals, community-based services, intervenor services, adult education, addiction, harm reduction, and Housing First initiatives.

Committed to advancing accessible and effective communication, Denise is currently completing the Plain Language Certificate Program at Simon Fraser University and has completed the Knowledge Translation Professional Certificate (KTPC™).

These educational pursuits support her work in translating complex information into clear, practical, and accessible resources and education materials. Denise also serves as a Board Member for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Deafblind Community Services, contributing to initiatives that promote inclusion, accessibility, and meaningful participation for individuals who are deafblind.

Connection in Practice

WORKSHOP #3

Drug Checking: Expanding Access Through a Mobile Harm Reduction Van

10:45 am - 12:00 pm and 1:45 pm - 3:00 pm

SESSION SUMMARY

This session will provide an overview of drug checking services, including the purpose of the program, how drug checking supports harm reduction, and what is required to safely and effectively deliver these services.

Participants will learn about the different components of a drug checking program and explore the practical requirements and considerations involved in establishing and maintaining a drug checking service, including regulatory requirements, partnerships, client engagement, result interpretation, and communication of unexpected or high-risk findings.

The goal of the session is to provide participants with a practical understanding of drug checking and the key elements required to implement and sustain a safe, accessible, and client-centred service.

NorWest Community Health Centres
Centres de santé communautaire NorWest

THUNDER BAY Drug Strategy

Thunder Bay District Health Unit

Connection in Practice

WORKSHOP #3 - CONTINUED

ABOUT NORWEST COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

NorWest Community Health Centres (NorWest CHC) is a community-based organization committed to improving the health and well-being of individuals and communities through accessible, inclusive, and comprehensive care. NorWest provides a wide range of integrated health and social services, including primary health care, mental health and substance use supports, midwifery, gender-affirming care, outreach, and system navigation.

NorWest CHC offers a Drug Checking Program to support people in making more informed decisions about the substances they may use. Drug checking can help identify the presence of certain substances and potential contaminants, providing valuable information that may reduce the risk of overdose and other drug-related harms.

The program also creates opportunities for meaningful conversations about harm reduction, safer substance use practices, overdose prevention, and connections to additional health and social supports. Through this service, NorWest CHC aims to meet people where they are and provide non-judgmental, compassionate care that respects individual choice and dignity.

NorWest Community Health Centres
Centres de santé communautaire NorWest

Connection in Practice

WORKSHOP #3 - CONTINUED

FACILITATOR BIOGRAPHY



Nicole Fieduna is a Registered Nurse and healthcare leader with experience in substance use, harm reduction, and community-based healthcare. She currently works as a manager with NorWest Community Health Centres where she provides oversight and support for programs serving individuals who experience complex health and social needs.

Throughout her career, Nicole has worked across a range of substance use and harm reduction services, including Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS), the Safer Supply program, and the HART Hub.

These experiences have provided her with a strong understanding of the challenges faced by people who use drugs and the importance of providing low-barrier, trauma-informed, and client-centred care.

Nicole currently supervises the Mobile Drug Checking Service, supporting the delivery of accessible drug checking within the community.

NorWest Community Health Centres
Centres de santé communautaire NorWest

THUNDER BAY Drug Strategy

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WORKSHOP #4

Shaping the Future of the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy

10:45 am - 12:00 pm and 1:45 pm - 3:00 pm

SESSION SUMMARY

The **Thunder Bay Drug Strategy** is being refreshed to better reflect current community needs. This interactive session will give participants an early opportunity to help shape its direction.

Following a brief overview of the Strategy and its five pillars, participants will discuss what has changed in Thunder Bay, what is working, where gaps remain and what should be prioritized moving forward. Feedback will help inform the broader refresh and ensure it reflects lived and living experience, local knowledge and community expertise.

ABOUT THUNDER BAY DRUG STRATEGY

The **Thunder Bay Drug Strategy** brings together people and organizations from across the community to reduce substance-related harms and improve health, safety and well-being. Coordinated by the City of Thunder Bay, it supports collaboration among service providers, Indigenous organizations, emergency services, community groups, people with lived and living experience, and other partners.

The Drug Strategy is guided by five connected pillars: prevention, treatment, harm reduction, enforcement and housing. Together, they support a broad response to both immediate needs and the factors that shape substance use and well-being.

The Strategy is currently being refreshed to reflect changing community needs, build on local strengths and partnerships, and set priorities for the years ahead. Harm reduction remains central to this work, supporting practical and compassionate approaches grounded in dignity, connection and care.

THUNDER BAY Drug Strategy

Thunder Bay District Health Unit

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WORKSHOP #4

FACILITATOR BIOGRAPHY



Rachel Globensky is the Drug Strategy Specialist with the City of Thunder Bay. She holds a Master of Health Sciences and brings 10 years of experience in community development, with a focus on asset-based approaches that build on local knowledge, strengths, and relationships.

In her current role, Rachel works with community partners and people with lived and living experience to support local responses to substance use, harm reduction, and community well-being. She is helping lead the refresh of the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy and will facilitate a workshop to hear what participants believe the updated strategy should prioritize.

Connection in Practice

NETWORKING EXERCISE

Changing the Picture: Rethinking Drug Education

1:00 pm - 1:45 pm

SESSION SUMMARY

Changing the Picture is an interactive networking exercise that invites participants to examine a variety of anti-drug posters and reflect on the messages they communicate.

Participants will share what stands out to them, identify language, imagery, or messaging they feel may contribute to stigma, and discuss why certain approaches may be ineffective or harmful.

The exercise encourages open conversation, diverse perspectives, and critical thinking about how we can communicate about substance use in more respectful, inclusive, and supportive ways.

Connection in Practice

PANEL DISCUSSION

Connection in Practice

3:15 pm - 4:15 pm

PANEL SUMMARY

Connection in Practice explores the importance of meaningful connection when working with queer and trans communities. Panelists will share perspectives on relationship-building, harm reduction, and meeting people where they are.

The discussion will highlight how trust, respect, inclusion, and community can strengthen connections, reduce harm, and support individual and collective well-being.

PANELISTS



Bonnie Aggamway



Rene Boucher



May Fianna



Rav Ramheera

Connection in Practice

PANELISTS

Bonnie Aggamway, Substance Use Health Coordinator at EFSNWO, is a social justice and harm reduction advocate guided by compassion and lived experience as a survivor of trauma, violence, and addiction. She works to dismantle stigma, challenge criminalization, and address systemic inequities facing marginalized communities.

Grounded in diversity, equity, decolonization, abolition, and systemic reform, Bonnie promotes alternatives to punitive systems that prioritize safety, autonomy, community healing, and mutual aid. Her approach centers care, courage, humor, and empathy. Advocating for harm reduction as a human right, Bonnie elevates lived experience across Thunder Bay and surrounding areas to support and respect people who use drugs.

Rene Boucher is a 2-Spirit Anishinaabe from Lac Seul First Nation, has been living with HIV for over 30 years, and is a cancer survivor. He worked as an HIV educator in Nishnawbe Aski Nation's Healthy Lifestyles Program from the early 1990s to 2015 and assisted in developing the Ontario First Nations HIV Education Circle. More recently, he worked for the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy as a Community Prevention Worker.

Rene uses his life experiences to support community members living with and affected by HIV/AIDS and is currently working on picking up his bundle and returning to share his own journey from service user, to service provider, to service user once again. This has been a personal journey to finding his own Truth and Reconciliation.

Connection in Practice

PANELISTS

May Fianna (she/her) has been a Marriage and Family Therapist and Gender Affirming Care educator for 12 years, and a certified Psychedelic Assisted Therapist for four years. May's skillset also includes education and multidisciplinary system building. She provides gender-affirming advocacy, consulting, and training for schools, workplaces, non-profits, and medical mental health clinics.

May is proud to have been a founding member of Connecticut's only multidisciplinary clinic for trans youth. In 2025, May relocated to Thunder Bay and is currently working at Thunder Bay Counselling spearheading the Gender Affirming Care Pathways Project: the effort to build a successor to the Umbrella Clinic.

Rav Ramheera (she/they) is a 2-Spirit and Trans Woman from Red Rock Indian Band (Lake Helen), residing in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Rav is a Community Support Supervisor with 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations. New to the Community Social Services sector, Rav brings experience in outreach, providing essential supplies, advocacy, and wraparound supports to community members in need.

Rav currently supervises "Every Story Matters," a project dedicated to documenting the lived experiences of 2-Spirit, Indigiqueer, and Transgender (2SIQT) people in Thunder Bay. The project seeks to amplify community voices while identifying systemic barriers and gaps in access to housing, healthcare, and social services. Through her work, Rav is committed to creating safer, more inclusive spaces and supporting the voices and well-being of the 2SIQT community.