

# ONTARIO DRUG TREATMENT COURTS

## 2019 ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN KEY FINDINGS

### Drug treatment courts

Drug treatment courts (DTCs) are a model of intervention, designed to provide support for individuals who have problematic relationships with substances that have contributed to their involvement with the justice system. DTCs fall under the umbrella term “therapeutic courts” or “wellness courts” and serve a similar purpose to mental health courts in Ontario.

Therapeutic courts have been developed and offered to individuals in conflict with the law as alternatives to incarceration. This often can involve community-based treatment services in conjunction with judicial supervision. Individuals who are in conflict with the law for reasons related to their substance use may be provided with the option of participating in a DTC, where they are provided supports to reduce the harms associated with their substance use and the links to criminal justice involvement.

### CMHA Ontario environmental scan

In 2019, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario reached out to Ontario’s 14 DTCs with a survey in order to develop a report that provides an overview of the current state of DTCs in the province. A wide range of representatives, including staff from organizations providing support and treatment services as well as members of the courts such as judges from DTCs across the province, took part in the survey. Topics in the scan included:

- Overview of the drug treatment court system/process in Ontario
- Discussion of inclusion/exclusion criteria among Ontario courts
- Discussion of incentives and sanctions used among Ontario’s DTCs
- Program requirements and operational practices
- Treatment options and graduation criteria



### Location of Ontario courts

At the completion of the 2019 environmental scan, there were 14 DTCs across the province, including Toronto, Durham Region, Guelph, Hamilton, Kenora, Lanark & Leeds/Grenville, Niagara, Ottawa, Peel Region, Peterborough, Waterloo and Windsor. During this time, Barrie and Woodstock were in the initial phases of implementing a DTC, while Kingston (operational since 2014) and London (operational since 2010) DTCs were both on hold.



## Identified operational challenges

The surveys inquired about operational challenges faced by Ontario DTCs. Common themes identified included:

- Lack of consistent, reliable funding for programming
- Differing beliefs in clinical best practices for substance use among support staff and court staff
- Staffing challenges, including frequent changes in partners, that can create inconsistencies and pose challenges in building relationships
- Logistical challenges (finding available court space, access to regular urine screens, client access to transportation, etc.)
- Difficulties in accessing support services in the community, including housing, withdrawal management services and residential treatment for DTC participants
- Challenges in accessing community supports for specific populations, including 2SLGBTQ+ participants and Indigenous populations, and support services for individuals with dual diagnosis such as an acquired brain injury or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)
- Challenges in determining whether psychoactive substances should be permitted within the program (prescription benzodiazepines and both medical and recreational cannabis were noted)

For further inquiries, please contact:

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