



Statement for International Overdose Awareness Day 2026

On International Overdose Awareness Day, members of the *Substance Use Health Network* (SUHN) grieve and remember the people we have lost. We honour lives and deaths that are often stigmatized or hidden, and carry that remembrance with us as we push for change every other day of the year.

SUHN brings together people with lived/living experience of criminalized drug use and allies. People who use drugs are not simply statistics in a toxic drug crisis. They are our members, colleagues, leaders, advocates, researchers, organizers, care providers, parents, and friends. Knowledge built through lived and living experience has saved lives and must be central to decisions that affect people who use drugs.

For too long, decisions about the lives of people who use drugs have been made without them. Again and again, people who use drugs have warned about the dangers of an unpredictable drug supply, criminalization, stigma, forced treatment, inadequate healthcare, and the loss of harm reduction services. Too often, those warnings have been ignored while more people die.

To our members and communities who use drugs: we hear this clearly: “We deserve better than being asked to survive systems that continue to put us at risk.”

As a network, our responsibility is not simply to listen, but to ensure lived and living expertise has real power in our work and the systems we seek to change. That means trusting people who use drugs as experts, supporting PWUD-led organizations, defending harm reduction, improving access to evidence-based treatment and safer alternatives to the unregulated drug supply, and challenging policies that punish people instead of supporting them.

It means refusing to accept preventable deaths as inevitable and being there for people who use drugs in life, treating them with respect and love, and as deserving of a good quality of life. It also means standing in solidarity with BIPOC and other communities disproportionately harmed by drug prohibition and its enforcement.

Today, we remember those who should still be here. We stand beside the people who are still here. And we recognize communities of people who use drugs who continue to care for one another, respond to overdoses, share knowledge, organize, and fight for change.

“Nothing about us without us” must mean more than a slogan. It means people who use drugs having real power wherever decisions affecting their lives are made - within SUHN, healthcare, research, policy, and government. For those of us without lived/living experience, it also means knowing when to stand beside, when to amplify, and when to get out of the way.