

It's either two options, stay sober and experience it and take on every painful emotion and painful memory of what just happened to you sober, or to use drugs to help deal with it, and most of us choose drugs
-Person who uses methamphetamine, Interview, October 11, 2019

I know people that are addicted to methamphetamine and have university degrees...some of them are lawyers...there's people out there who are teachers and social workers, they're from all different backgrounds.
-WB resident and person who uses methamphetamine

A lot of people are stuck on alcohol and amphetamines, and it's actually what saves them... I use it to survive. It keeps me alive when I need to stay warm in drastically cold weather
-Person who uses methamphetamine, Interview, October 11, 2019

[We need] more places that are open throughout the day. There's a lot of homeless people and they need a place, especially when the weather [is bad]
-Person who uses methamphetamine, Interview, September 27th, 2019

Executive Summary

West Broadway Community Methamphetamine Strategy

Background

The West Broadway Methamphetamine Strategy was born from the collaborative efforts and communal concerns of members who sit on the West Broadway Directors Network (WBDN), a committee spearheaded by the West Broadway Community Organization. In 2015, members of WBDN voiced concerns about the rising use of injectable drugs—most specifically concern for people using the drugs, and the associated issues such as the spike in property crimes, littered needles on the street, and the safety of resident businesses and organizations.

This report, the *West Broadway Community Methamphetamine Strategy*, authored by Manitoba Research Alliance authors Erica Charron and Laura Canfield, outlines the background, methodology and direction of the community strategy.

Methodology

Through extensive discussions within the WBDN, three goals were developed to guide the development of this community-based strategy. First, to ignite a cohesive approach between community organizations in addressing the risks and harms associated with methamphetamine use. Second, to serve as a tool that can guide community members to resources and best practice procedures when connecting with those who use methamphetamine. Lastly, this strategy aims to provide a systematic assessment to determine service and policy gaps that can be used as a tool for advocacy and reducing barriers for those who use meth. This WBDN's community-centred approach describes well the participatory approach to seeking solutions. It

is from this perspective that the WBDN began the process of developing this strategy informed by lessons learned elsewhere but most important from the lived experiences of neighbourhood residents.

The West Broadway Strategy aims to present a framework specific to the needs of the community that involves the voices of those who have been omitted thus far—people who use drugs. The strategy intends to destigmatize those who use methamphetamine, provide a platform for their stories, and demonstrate that the “meth crisis” in Winnipeg is actually much more complicated than just a crisis of methamphetamine itself. As illustrated in the Findings section, the use of the word ‘crisis’ varies depending on the individual. The consensus of whether or not we are experiencing a crisis is also in debate within the communities of people who use methamphetamine. This strategy intends to paint these various perspectives, while bringing to life a deeper analysis of the issue that has been missing in mainstream discourse.

The process was rooted in community consultation, collaboration, and engaging the expertise of those actually living the experience. The following was undertaken in this process:

1. Undertaking one-on-one interviews and surveys with 25 people who use methamphetamine, and 20 business owner and/or community service organizations, and aggregating their responses to find common trends, challenges, and suggested solutions.
2. Reviewing best practices from other jurisdictions experiencing similar issues.
3. Building upon previous community-based research and initiatives in Winnipeg.
4. Creating a community asset map to identify the strengths and resources that already exist in the West Broadway neighbourhood.
5. Presenting tangible government and system level recommendations that can be implemented with the existing resources available in the city.

Identifying the Gaps

The depth of awareness around the issues associated with methamphetamine use in the West Broadway neighbourhood was clearly demonstrated during our conversations with all participant groups. The gaps that emerged shed light on the unique perspectives of people who use methamphetamine regarding how to address this issue they experience first-hand nearly every day. Meanwhile, these themes were strongly echoed among community agencies and businesses demonstrating an alignment of views, a desire to understand the complexity of the issue through education, and willingness to participate in solutions alongside those who use. Although there were some differences in opinion between groups, all participants emphasized a passionate commitment to fostering a welcoming and sustainable neighbourhood for all residents.

Gap 1: Housing with Support

When asked what they (service providers and people who use) felt was missing from the West Broadway community, many users identified housing with supports. Transitional housing

models similar to the Bell Hotel were identified as a desirable solution. Currently, the only supportive housing that exists in the West Broadway Neighbourhood specific to substance users is Two-Ten Recovery and satellite location Cole's House. These sites are small, abstinence based, and often have long wait times.

Gap 2: 24 Hour Safe Spaces

Conversations with methamphetamine users demonstrated an overwhelming need for a 24-hour safe space that offers support and services to individuals experiencing homelessness, substance abuse and mental health issues. Furthermore, agency representatives identified this as a major gap in services available to residents of the neighbourhood, and Winnipeg at large.

Gap 3: Lack of Mental Health Supports to Tackle Trauma

Both methamphetamine users and service providers pointed to intergenerational trauma as a precursor to methamphetamine use, recognizing that substance use is deeply connected to the ongoing colonization of Indigenous people. CBO representatives often identified mental health supports as a significant gap in their services, admitting they do not have the expertise of funding to be able to provide the level of support required for many of their participants. The ineffectiveness of standard 28-day treatment programs was also addressed, suggesting that treatment for methamphetamine use will require more long-term programs and wrap-around mental health supports (Virgo Consulting, 2018).

Gap 4: Fair Representation

Overwhelmingly, all community members expressed strong belief that the media has both historically and presently presented a very glib narrative of the problem. As illustrated in the Winnipeg Free Press articles dating back to the 1980s, methamphetamine has consistently been associated with crime, fear, violence, policing, and an underworld that will tantalize and consume unsuspecting youth. Most currently, headlines such as "Methamphetamine, Madness and Misery" and "Ice Storm: How Methamphetamine is Holding Manitoba Hostage" are only presenting one image, hyperbolizing a single story — a catastrophe; an epidemic of mindless violence and inebriating squalor. This messaging is not only pivotal in shaping public opinion; it "plays a powerful role in the construction of social problems...and often contribute to creating or sustaining moral panics and heightened anxieties around drugs and crime" (Maier, 2019). It is important to remember that there is a danger to a single story, it's not that the story is untrue, it's that it's incomplete (Adichie, 2009). The implications of this point strongly to what CBOs and community advocates have been relabelling as an intersectional crisis of poverty, trauma, and colonialism.

People who use methamphetamine and community representatives who participated in interviews describe many faces of this issue that are missing from media and mainstream discourse, primarily that there are many communities of people that span all income brackets who use crystal methamphetamine, the increases in violence and theft in the city can be attributed to more complicated reasons than just methamphetamine, and that the term 'crisis' is proliferated with superficial analysis. It is essential not to dismiss the realities of people who

are actually in the grip of crisis in this community. The majority of the people who use methamphetamine that were interviewed were explicitly able to describe an event or sequence of events that have brought them to their current situation. These events are all traumatic and have had ongoing intersectional effects throughout their lives that have created barriers to regaining stability or finding it all together.

Gap 5: Education for the Public

People who use methamphetamine described sympathetically that the public is uneducated on the issue, and not to their own fault. Once again, the presentation of the issue through the media and police repeatedly linking crime and violence as only methamphetamine-related has had resounding effects in shaping public perception of people who use. Conversations implied a desire of community members to learn more about the root causes and sociocultural context of methamphetamine use in West Broadway, along with a desire to increase their capacity in engaging with people who use in the community via training.

Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to complement and build upon the research in this report and to align with the important work being done by others to improve how we respond to the complex issues related to methamphetamine use in Winnipeg. The strategy focuses on 6 primary actions.

1. Forming a West Broadway Community Strategy Team
2. Creating a Community Capacity Building Hub Within the WBDN Membership
3. Call Upon All Levels of Government to Take Responsibility for the Ongoing Methamphetamine Issue and Invest in Adequately Supported, Diverse, and Tailored Substance Use Support Options
4. Investigate the Acquisition of Available Public Facilities and/or Privately Listed Building to Repurpose into a 24/7 Safe Space and Supported Housing Units for People Struggling with Substance Abuse
5. Call on the City and Province to Establish a Comprehensive Harm Reduction Strategy with Clear Targets and Timelines
6. Develop a Streamlined Partnership with Health Service Providers such as the WRHA, Nine Circles Community Health Centre, and Klinik Community Health Centre to Address Specific Mental Health Gaps Within the Neighbourhood

In our conversations with all interviewees, a loud chord was struck for increasing human connection, acceptance, and empathy, and the need for balanced approaches reverberated through all ideas. Respondents asserted that if politicians, policy makers, and the public could begin to participate in a practice of anti-oppression, detach themselves from the hook of moral panic, and choose a process of fighting against stigma and resisting stereotypes, many of the gaps articulated through this study would naturally begin to narrow.