

Hello OHRN Friends,

Since the release of our first quarterly newsletter, much has happened in the world for us to reflect on and act upon on: a rise in overdose deaths; anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism; police violence; ongoing homophobia and transphobia; and a COVID19 response which has left too many at risk, especially homeless folks. June marks several events that we hope highlight that we are all connected and will bring forward critical change.

June is Pride Month - while many LGBTQ2S people feel liberated and free to celebrate, too many are complacent to the ongoing oppression and discrimination that others in within their own communities continue to live with and many have forgotten, or maybe don't know, that it was Trans Women of Colour at the forefront of change decades ago.

June 19, or Juneteenth, commemorates the end of slavery in the United States. Ongoing murders of Black and Indigenous people have recently initiated broader public awareness and discussion about police sanctioned violence, the role police play in society and systemic racism. , but many people only now became aware of the significance of this date because Black people are literally fighting for their lives in the streets.

June 21 was National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada, yet this month we again saw the murders of Indigenous people when police respond to "Wellness Checks" and violent assaults during police stops of Indigenous people.

June is also Brain Injury Awareness Month - a 2009 publication found a lifetime prevalence among homeless participants in Toronto was 53% for any traumatic brain injury and 12% for moderate or severe traumatic brain injury. For 70% of respondents, their first traumatic brain injury occurred before the onset of homelessness. Many people experience brain injury as the result of drug overdose.

In June, Ontario released overdose data that showed yearly opioid deaths up yet again (1,535 in 2019, from 1,450 in 2018). As well, overdose deaths from all drugs have increased by an estimated 25% since the COVID pandemic hit.

COVID19 has surfaced serious health and social inequities.

Many working in harm reduction understand Canada's drug laws and policies are racist and classist and are not based on any evidence or science. Our drug policy has created stigma against people who use drugs. Laws, and how they applied, unfairly targeted specific groups and disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous people. We have diverted resource away from housing, counselling and mental health supports and instead funded police, courts and prisons. The police have failed to stop the flow of drugs while the supply is increasingly toxic.

If we value human life, individual liberty, and a fair, equitable and safe community, then our entire approach to drug use makes no sense.

For some, Pride might be a time of celebration but it can also be a time for focused activism and protest – after all, Pride was born out of riots and protest against police actions and societal discrimination, and challenging the status quo.