

Support life-saving supervised consumption and overdose prevention sites: open letter to Premier Doug Ford and Health Minister Christine Elliott

August 30, 2018

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Elliott:

We write to you as organizations concerned about the health and welfare of some of the most vulnerable Ontarians, following reports that your government plans to undertake an unnecessary review of the evidence on supervised consumption sites (SCS),¹ and the even more troubling announcement that you are imposing a moratorium on the approval of new overdose prevention sites (OPS).²

All the available evidence, including substantial peer-reviewed scientific literature, demonstrates conclusively that these health services save lives and promote the health of people who use drugs. This includes opening doors to treatment. Rather than conduct an unnecessary review and delay expansion of these services, the Ontario government should work with community organizations and health providers to rapidly scale up these services. Delays mean more preventable overdose deaths and new infections of HIV, hepatitis C and other illnesses that could be averted.

Multiple reviews of the evidence have already been done, and have established that SCS and OPS:

- provide a needed health service, reducing overdose deaths and the sharing of drug-injection equipment (and the associated risk of transmission of blood-borne infections);
- increase access to addiction treatment and other necessary health services; and
- benefit public order by reducing public injecting.³

As you know, Canada is experiencing a large-scale opioid overdose crisis. In Ontario alone, overdose deaths related to opioids increased by 45 per cent in 2017, with more than three people dying every day during that year.⁴ The opioid overdose epidemic has been called “the worst drug safety crisis in Canadian history.”⁵ HIV, hepatitis C and other infections, as well as overdose deaths, are preventable if the right measures are taken. These include increasing voluntary access to treatment for problematic drug use (where Ontario must do better), and also simultaneously scaling up evidence-based harm reduction services such as SCS and OPS.

We urge you to heed the recommendations of experts in public health, front-line clinicians, harm reduction staff, and people with lived experience of drug use. Rather than impeding access to life-saving health services, we urge you to work with community organizations and other health services providers to ensure greater, equitable access to SCS and OPS for the people of Ontario.

Signed:

Aboriginal Legal Services
ACAS—Asian Community AIDS Services
Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights
Addiction Services of Thames Valley
Addictions and Mental Health Ontario
Africans in Partnership Against AIDS
AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia
AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area
AIDS Committee of Toronto
AIDS Committee of Windsor
AIDS Committee of York Region
AIDS Vancouver Island
Alliance for Healthier Communities
Atlantic Interdisciplinary Research Network on
Hepatitis C and HIV
Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention
Breakaway Addiction Services
Broadbent Institute
Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers
Support Network)
CACTUS
Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network
Canadian AIDS Society
Canadian Association of Community Health
Centres
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Canadian Medical Association
Canadian Mental Health Association—Thunder
Bay Branch
Canadian Nurses Association
Canadian Positive People Network
Canadian Public Health Association
Canadian Research Initiative on Substance
Misuse—Prairie Node
Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Canadian Treatment Action Council
Casey House
CATIE
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
(CAMH)
Centre for Social Innovation
Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation
Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
Community Legal Assistance Sarnia
Community Legal Services of Ottawa /
Services juridiques communautaires d'Ottawa
Community YWCA Muskoka
Courage Co-Lab Inc.
Direction 180
Dopamine
Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation
Elevate NWO
Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic
Four Counties Addiction Services Team
Gerstein Crisis Centre
Guelph Community Health Centre
Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge Drug
Strategy
Halifax Area Network of Drug Using People
(HANDUP)
Harm Reduction Nurses Association
Health Providers Against Poverty
HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario
HIV Edmonton
HIV/AIDS Regional Services
HIV/AIDS Resources and Community Health
Houselink Community Homes
Housing Action Now!
Huron Perth Community Legal Clinic
Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC)
Injured Workers Community Legal Clinic
Inner City Health and Wellness Program
Interagency Coalition on AIDS and
Development (ICAD)
Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal
Services
Lake Country Community Legal Clinic
Lakeside HOPE House
Lanark County Interval House
L'Anonyme
Legal Clinic of Guelph and Wellington County
Maggie's Toronto Sexwork Action Project
Maison Fraternité
Mission Services of Hamilton Inc.
Mississauga Community Legal Services
MODIFY: Drug Insight From Youth
Moms Stop the Harm
mumsDU - moms united and mandated to
saving the lives of Drug Users
Native Youth Sexual Health Network
Neighbourhood Legal Services London &
Middlesex
Nipissing Community Legal Clinic
OHIP for All

Ontario AIDS Network (OAN)
Ontario Nurses' Association
Ontario Positive Asians (OPA+)
Ottawa Salus
Overdose Prevention Ottawa
Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre
Parkdale Community Legal Services
Parkdale Queen West Community Health
Centre
PASAN
PHS Community Services Society
Planned Parenthood Toronto
Queer Ontario
Racial Health Equity Network
Realize
Reelout Arts Project
Regent Park Community Health Centre
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection
Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
(RNAO)
Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services
Sandy Hill Community Health Centre
South Riverdale Community Health Centre
Stonegate Community Health Centre
Street Health
Students for Sensible Drug Policy, Ryerson
Chapter
Superior North Emergency Medical Service
Syme Woolner Neighbourhood and Family
Centre
Tanner Steffler Foundation
The AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener,
Waterloo and Area
The Children's Aid Society of the District of
Thunder Bay
The Interfaith Coalition to Fight Homelessness
The Mental Health Consumer Survivor Project
for Simcoe County
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board
Thunder Bay Drug Strategy
Timmins-Temiskaming Community Legal
Clinic
Toronto Overdose Prevention Society
Toronto People With AIDS Foundation
Waterloo Region Community Legal Services
WellFort Community Health Services
West Neighbourhood House
West Toronto Community Legal Services

Women & HIV/AIDS Initiative, Ontario
YW Kitchener–Waterloo
YWCA Hamilton
YWCA Niagara Region
YWCA Toronto

Endnotes

¹ F. Merali, "PCs 'playing politics with people's lives' on injection sites, drug policy expert warns," *CBC News*, August 4, 2018. Available at: www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/supervised-injection-sites-waiting-1.4771143.

² K. Bueckert, "Ontario puts new overdose prevention sites approvals on hold," *CBC News*, August 11, 2018. Available at: www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/ontario-overdose-prevention-sites-approval-hold-1.4782132.

³ E.g., M. Kennedy, M. Karamouzian & T. Kerr. "Public Health and Public Order Outcomes Associated with Supervised Drug Consumption Facilities: A Systematic Review," *Current HIV/AIDS Reports*, 2017; 14(5): 161-183, doi: 10.1007/s11904-017-0363-y. Available at: www.salledeconsommation.fr/_media/public-health-and-public-order-outcomes-associated-with-supervised-drug-consumption-facilities-a-systematic-review.pdf.

⁴ Public Health Ontario, "Opioid-related morbidity and mortality in Ontario," May 23, 2018. Available at: www.publichealthontario.ca/en/dataandanalytics/pages/opioid.aspx#/trends.

⁵ Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators' Network of Ontario, "Opioid Epidemic: Call for Urgent Action That Can Save Lives Now," December 9, 2015.