



**Speaking Notes: Deputation to the
Toronto Board of Health in Support
of Supervised Injection Services**

July 10, 2013

**The Registered Nurses' Association
of Ontario (RNAO)**



RNAO Deputation to Toronto Board of Health
Wednesday, July 10, 2013 1300

Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen Street West, Committee Room 2

Good afternoon. My name is Doris Grinspun. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. RNAO is the professional association for registered nurses who practise in all roles and sectors across the province.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, proudly representing Ontario's registered nurses, to speak in support of supervised injection services (SIS). This issue is important to registered nurses as health-care professionals, community members, family members, and friends of loved ones whose lives are at risk because of substance use and addiction. Implementing SIS is pragmatic, evidence-based policy that will improve health outcomes, prevent needless deaths, and contribute to safer communities.

It is important to understand that substance abuse and addiction are not the result of a person's character flaw, weakness, or matter of choice. Many factors including genetics, physical and mental illness, historical and current experiences of trauma, homelessness, and poverty can make people vulnerable to becoming addicted to any number of substances and behaviours. Addiction is almost impossible to overcome alone. SIS is a form of harm reduction that recognizes the many challenges that people face, and provides individuals with the appropriate care that they need. From the academic research and our clinical nursing experience, we know that SIS makes a huge difference in people's lives. By treating people with respect and establishing trusting relationships, SIS expert nurses and other health workers open a safe window and hope. We know from the experiences in Vancouver and internationally that SIS helps vulnerable people to access health and social services including first aid, HIV testing, acute and chronic wound care, immunizations, reproductive health care, screening and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, health education, overdose prevention and management, counseling and referrals to other services such as detox.

The stakes could not be higher. That is why RNAO, the Canadian Nurses Association, and the Association of Registered Nurses of British Columbia were interveners in support of keeping Vancouver's supervised injection site, Insite, open in the 2011 Supreme Court case. That is why these nursing groups, as well as the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Public Health Association, oppose the flawed federal government's Bill C-65, which is designed to prevent SIS implementation. RNAO supports both of Toronto Public Health's recommendations: to register opposition to Bill C-65 to the federal government, and to advocate for provincial funding for SIS. In fact, on July 2, 2013, RNAO released an open letter to the provincial Minister of Health, Deb Matthews, urging Ontario to fund the integration of SIS into existing provincially funded clinical health services for people who use drugs. Members of the public who would like to join our members in supporting SIS are welcome to send a message to Minister Matthews. You can go to RNAO's website, which is www.RNAO.ca, and sign our Action Alert.

Your leadership is critical not only for the people of Toronto but also for vulnerable people across Ontario and Canada who are suffering and dying today because they do not have access to SIS – a critical health service. Real people's lives will be saved and the collective health of our communities will be improved.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to be here today and I look forward to answering any questions that you might have.