

Access to Supervised Injection Services

Can we count on your support to save lives by providing expedited provincial funding for supervised injection services (SIS) in Ottawa, Toronto, and any other SIS needed across the province as part of existing health services?

Record numbers of Ontarians across the province continue to die without access to supervised injection services (SIS). There were 638 people in Ontario who died in 2013 from opioid overdoses and 3, 241 opioid-related emergency department visits in 2014.¹ As an example of escalating urgency, Toronto Public Health confirmed a 77 per cent increase in reported deaths from drug overdose from 146 in 2004 to 258 in 2014, the highest annual number in Toronto to date.² In Ottawa, an average of 48 people per year die of drug-related causes.³ Safer spaces where people can inject previously obtained drugs with access to nursing services prevents deaths from overdoses, decreases infections, and enables access to other critical health and social services.⁴

On July 14, 2016 Toronto City Council approved a Toronto Board of Health proposal in support of three SIS locations at South Riverdale Community Health Centre, Queen West--Central Toronto Community Health Centre, and the Works program (Toronto Public Health).⁵ These well-respected health organizations already provide harm reduction services for the highly marginalized people they serve in their communities. On December 1, 2016 these organizations submitted applications to the federal government to obtain the necessary approvals.⁶ On June 21, 2016, the Ottawa Board of Health voted in favour of supporting proposals from community health centres to set up SIS services as recommended by Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health.⁷ Work is now underway to complete the federal exemption application requirements under section 56.1(2) of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*. As of January 10, 2017, the Sandy Hill Community Health's application was awaiting a required letter of support from Ottawa Police Chief Charles Bordeleau. London⁸ and Thunder Bay⁹ are in the process of doing studies to explore the need for and feasibility of SIS in their communities.^{10 11}

On January 9, 2017 Health Minister Hoskins sent letters to federal Health Minister Philpott to support the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre SIS application for Ottawa¹² and Toronto's SIS application for three locations.^{13 14} RNAO deeply appreciates Minister Hoskins' letter of support and the reported commitment "to fund"¹⁵ or "help fund"¹⁶ these four SIS sites. However, RNAO remains gravely concerned that "Ontario has not committed a specific dollar amount"^{17 18 19} and that a secure financial commitment is not yet in place.

An Ontarian suffering from a heart attack or a broken leg can access health services based on need. Those with addiction and mental health challenges should be able to do the same as a basic human right.²⁰ SIS are health services that should already be open in Ontario instead of allowing more people to die.

References:

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