

July 29, 2008

The Honourable Tony Clement, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health  
Health Canada  
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture  
Postal Locator: 0906C  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

RE: Support for continued operation of INSITE, Vancouver's Safe Injection Site (SIS)

Dear Minister Clement,

We are writing in collective concern over the federal government's decision to appeal the B.C. Supreme Court's ruling that is allowing INSITE to remain open indefinitely. Through these intentions, the government is failing to recognize the overwhelming amount of national and global scientific and psychosocial evidence that is uniformly supportive of SISs, including INSITE.

INSITE has provided a safe, healthy and supportive environment for over 8,000 unique drug users since 2003. Results from studies performed concurrently (including the recent federal Ministry of Health's report prepared by its Expert Advisory Committee) during INSITE's operation have continually reflected the facility's mandate: increased access to health and addiction care; reduced overdose fatalities; reduced transmission of blood-borne viral infections (i.e. HIV and Hepatitis C); reduced other injection-related infections (e.g. skin abscesses); and improved public order.

As health-care providers working with marginalized populations, these aforementioned benefits do not come as a surprise. Harm reduction encompasses more than mere actions, but embodies a philosophy that speaks to the universal human right of being treated with dignity, respect, compassion and understanding in a country that has created persisting systemic social hardships for many Canadians. It is important to understand that we need inclusive and compassionate strategies to protect the health of marginalized Canadian citizens, including people who use substances.

Through its compassionate care and understanding, INSITE has undoubtedly changed people's lives, turning them around for the better. We urge the government to show support for the continued operation of INSITE.

Sincerely,

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