

# 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),<sup>1</sup> and the even more troubling announcement that you are imposing a moratorium on the approval of new overdose prevention sites (OPS).<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> The opioid overdose epidemic has been called “the worst drug safety crisis in Canadian history.”<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/supervised-injection-sites-waiting-1.4771143).

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/ontario-overdose-prevention-sites-approval-hold-1.4782132).

<sup>3</sup> 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](http://www.salledeconsommation.fr/_media/public-health-and-public-order-outcomes-associated-with-supervised-drug-consumption-facilities-a-systematic-review.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Public Health Ontario, "Opioid-related morbidity and mortality in Ontario," May 23, 2018. Available at: [www.publichealthontario.ca/en/dataandanalytics/pages/opioid.aspx#/trends](http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/dataandanalytics/pages/opioid.aspx#/trends).

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