



**Healthy Beginnings
to Healthy Aging**

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Members, Toronto Board of Health
c/o Julie Lavertu, Board Secretariat
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Dear Toronto Board of Health Members:

Re: Harm Reduction Policy

As a practicing emergency physician in Central Toronto, former ED Director and former Emergency Medicine Lead for Toronto Central LHIN, I've been quite involved in many aspects of the opioid crisis and response. A key element of that response is a philosophy of harm reduction. That includes providing supervised injection sites, overdose prevention centres, naloxone distribution as well as clean needles. These strategies involve hospital EDs, public health and community organizations amongst others.

Supervised injection sites are one of the better studied pillars of this approach, and have been demonstrated in many jurisdictions, to save lives, and contrary to frequently expressed fears, benefit neighbouring communities. A belief that harm reduction enables substance use is also often heard but this is not borne out by experience either. Supervised injection sites not only save lives they allow the development of relationships with users that can lead to trust and opportunities that support rehabilitation and recovery. The very provision of public facilities can bring users literally and figuratively out of the shadows and back into the mainstream of society where recovery is more likely.

I believe the views I've expressed are well grounded in evidence and supported by the majority of my colleagues in Toronto EDs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard Ovens", written in a cursive style.

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