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Toronto Board of Health  
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June 14, 2018

Chair Mihevc & Members of the Board,

South Riverdale Community Health Centre would like to congratulate the Board of Health on the work done to date in successfully supporting the life-saving services of Supervised Consumption Sites embedded in existing Harm Reduction Programs. These and Overdose Prevention Sites are strategies that have reduced the numbers of deaths from mounting drug overdoses resulting from a toxic drug supply across the city, province and country.

South Riverdale CHC has operated a robust Harm Reduction program for over 20 years and is now able to provide supervised injections to an exceedingly vulnerable population. Since opening this service in November 2017, we have supervised over 1400 injections and experienced only 2 overdoses which did not result in deaths. Each time someone injects in our space we are saving a life. People are not rushed, are able to inject more slowly and cautiously and can connect with clinical and support staff, building trust and gaining access (if they wish) to other health and social services. The people who use drugs in our space will then encourage others to come to our site. We have learned much over the past 7 months and are continuing to do outreach and make changes to meet the complex needs of people who use drugs.

The Board of Health has worked successfully with the Province to increase services over the past year. The OPS in Moss Park, erected over 10 months ago will shortly transition to an indoor facility enabling more privacy for the population with whom volunteers and workers have built a trusting relationship over this time. And it is important to recognize that the OPS was initially erected in Moss Park because it has been an active area of both homelessness and substance use for decades. That is, people have purchased homes and moved there knowing it is a thriving and diverse community. The OPS and services of outreach and Harm Reduction have combined to make this a safer community with fewer discarded needles, people receiving support and the ability to transition a marginalized population to other services while saving lives.

Over the past few years, public health and Community Health Centres have seen increases in needle distribution, the numbers of people accessing services and the number of negative health events – HIV is now on the rise after a time of no or little increase; hepatitis C continues to spread. And there are increasing drug overdoses among these populations. The sustaining and expanding of Harm Reduction and supervised consumption services, will not only save lives, but improve the health of this population in the city of Toronto. Evidence shows that SCS will reduce negative health events and also facilitate access to other services thereby preventing the spread of HIV, Hepatitis C and other infectious diseases while contributing to reduced costs for the healthcare system.

Every day in our work we see the importance of how low-threshold interventions successfully engage people and create pathways to better health. Harm Reduction, SCS and OPS are examples of these low-threshold opportunities where people can connect with the healthcare system in a non-judgmental fashion creating possibilities for healthier outcomes.



The recommended decentralized strategy for Toronto has served us well and we encourage the Board of Health to sustain and expand these services to ensure that we do not contribute to an increase in deaths within a population who needs this increasingly integrated system which has seen thousands of supervised injections and saved lives.

Addressing substance use requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. The Toronto Drug Strategy has provided an excellent framework to ensure this exists. Once again we look forward to the leadership demonstrated by the Board of Health and their community partners to sustain and expand these services. To not do so would be unethical, immoral and further stigmatize an already disenfranchised and needy population. And with your endorsement, we will ensure the work continues.

Respectfully submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynne Raskin".

Lynne Raskin CEO, South Riverdale Community Health Centre.

cc Jill Barber, Chair of SRCHC Board of Directors

John Tory

Dr. Eileen de Villa

Joe Cressy

Paula Fletcher