

June 5, 2020

Dear Members of the Board,

I am writing with regard to agenda item *2020.HL17.2, Toronto Overdose Action Plan: Status Report 2020*, under consideration by the Board of Health on June 8, 2020.

As you know, the opioid crisis continues to claim the lives of Torontonians at an alarming rate, and supervised consumption spaces play a crucial role in saving lives. I recently led a collaborative evaluation of the implementation of the Overdose Prevention Site (OPS) model in Toronto. Our findings demonstrate the benefits of these sites and the need to expand existing services by funding more sites.

This research project, funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, collected qualitative data from 5 injection spaces in Toronto: St. Stephen's OPS, Street Health OPS, the Supervised Consumption Service at Parkdale-Queen West Community Health Centre (Parkdale site), Regent Park Community Health Centre's Consumption and Treatment Service site, and Moss Park OPS. Our findings show the many benefits of the OPS model, including prevention and reversal of overdoses, responsive and flexible service that meets the needs of communities, providing pathways to primary healthcare, and fostering client autonomy.

Importantly, our data affirms a need for an increase in the number of supervised consumption spaces throughout the city, particularly in places where people already use drugs, such as shelters, drop-ins and apartment buildings. Participants emphasized that a variety of different sites and types of injection spaces is crucial in ensuring that there are options to suit a range of client needs. A key feature of the sites we studied was their small size and low client volume; we heard directly from staff and clients that low-volume sites that serve specific community needs allow delivery of high-quality, lifesaving services; creating more of these sites must be a priority.

These findings support the recommendations proposed by the Medical Officer of Health; it is crucial that the cap on Consumption and Treatment Service sites in Ontario be lifted, and that additional supervised consumption spaces open to fill the increasing need for these services. Both staff and clients at the research sites reported a need for increased access to safer supply programs across the city. Staff and clients alike also articulated a need for grief and trauma supports for opioid overdose.

Responding to the opioid crisis must be a priority in the City's COVID-19 recovery and rebuilding efforts. I hope that you find the information I have shared here to be of use.

Sincerely,



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