



Letter from Katie Mayerson, The North End Harm Reduction Network

November 12, 2020

To the Board of Health – City of Toronto,

The North End Harm Reduction Network is a group of frontline harm reduction workers representing the agencies that provide harm reduction services and programs north of St. Clair Avenue West and west of Yonge Street. Between us, we have a diversity of lived experience. Our agencies include Unison Health and Community Services, Black Creek Community Health Centre, Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention, Eva’s Satellite, John Howard Society, Weston King Neighbourhood Centre, Syme Woolner Neighbourhood and Family Centre, and Lumenus Community Services. The North End Harm Reduction Network’s overall goal is to have comprehensive and well-coordinated harm reduction services that meet the needs of people who use drugs in the north part of the city. Our vision is increased levels of service, accessible safer use sites, trauma-informed health care and social services, and no preventable deaths within our communities.

Last time we addressed the Board of Health, we asked that you urge Toronto Community Housing to implement harm reduction policies and to work with harm reduction organizations to facilitate programming for tenants who use drugs. Some positive steps were being taken before the pandemic hit, and we look forward to continuing this work.

We are submitting this letter today to offer our full support of the recommendations outlined in the *Report from the Medical Officer of Health on Opioid Poisoning Crisis in Toronto – Update*, and to highlight some additional considerations. Our clients, colleagues, and friends continue to die entirely preventable deaths and our hearts are perpetually broken. As such, we have a responsibility to highlight some of the inequities we see.

As you may be aware, there are no safer consumption sites north of College Street. While we recognize that the heat maps made available on the Toronto Overdose Information System show a concentration of overdoses happening in the downtown area, they also show that overdoses are occurring across the rest of the city as well. The centralization of consumption services downtown makes them wholly inaccessible to drug users across midtown, North York,

Scarborough, and Etobicoke. With COVID 19 raging through our city, more people are using alone in an attempt to limit their risk of exposure to the virus, and we are on track as a province to have lost 2,200 drug users to fatal overdoses by the end of 2020.

Similarly, all current safe supply programs are in downtown community health care agencies. Given both the distance and resource intensity of providing safe supply health care, people using drugs in the North do not have access to these projects.

While we recognize that the City is limited in what it can do to increase the number of safer consumption sites and safer supply pilot programs at this time, we share these as two of the many examples of how drug users living in the north end of the city face the same risks but have far less access to lifesaving supports.

With this in mind, we request that the unique needs of north, east, and west ends be considered and explicitly included in all current and future conversations and planning around harm reduction that occurs at the city level. The North End Harm Reduction Network will continue to work together to do the lifesaving work of harm reduction in the north end of the city. We appreciate your collaboration and support.

Sincerely,

The North End Harm Reduction Network