



## Gord Perks

Councillor Ward 14 Parkdale-High Park

**Toronto City Hall**  
100 Queen Street W. Ste. A14  
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

{P} 416-392-7919  
{F} 416-392-0398  
{E} [councillor\\_perks@toronto.ca](mailto:councillor_perks@toronto.ca)  
{W} [www.gordperks.ca](http://www.gordperks.ca)



June 21, 2013

**To:** Chair and Members of the Board of Health

**From:** Councillor Gord Perks  
Chair, Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel

**Re:** **Supervised Injection Services Toolkit**

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The Council-approved Toronto Drug Strategy (TDS) provides a comprehensive approach to alcohol and other drug issues based on the integrated components of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement. The TDS Implementation Panel is a multi-sectoral leadership group that provides oversight and strategic advice for implementation of the drug strategy's 68 recommendations.

One of the TDS recommendations was to conduct a needs assessment and feasibility study for supervised consumption (injection and inhalation) services, taking into account the decentralized nature of drug use in Toronto. Supervised injection services (SIS) are health services that provide a safe and hygienic environment where people can inject pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of trained staff. An independent team of experts, led by senior researchers at the University of Toronto and St. Michael's Hospital, conducted the research. In April 2012, results of the research were released in a report entitled, *The Toronto and Ottawa Supervised Consumption Assessment Study (TOSCA)*. The study concluded that Toronto would benefit from several SISs. The recommended model was to integrate SISs into existing health services already working with people who inject drugs, and that the program be well evaluated.

Following the release of TOSCA, the TDS Implementation Panel struck a diverse working group to look at SIS implementation challenges and solutions. Working group members included municipal, institutional and community-based representatives from the areas of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, enforcement, primary health, mental health, community legal services, newcomer communities, and people who use drugs. The group deliberated on the range of issues associated with SISs with a view to determining the drug strategy could contribute to this issue in Toronto. In the end, the group developed the *Supervised Injection Services Toolkit* (as attached), which I am pleased to present to the Board of Health for its information, on behalf of the TDS Implementation Panel.

The purpose of the toolkit is to provide information and resources to assist organizations considering whether to provide supervised injection services in Toronto. The toolkit is intended for use by decision makers, potential service providers, and other community stakeholders. The content draws on relevant policy and research as well as input from diverse stakeholders and experts in Toronto and Vancouver.

Topics addressed in the toolkit include: demonstration of local need; program and clinical service design; community engagement; police protocols; communications; and performance measures.

In Canada, legally sanctioned SISs require an exemption under the *Controlled Drugs & Substances Act* to protect staff and clients from criminal prosecution for possession of controlled substances (e.g., illicit drugs). These exemptions are granted by the federal Minister of Health. The current federal government attempted to close Vancouver's SIS (InSite) by denying an ongoing CDSA exemption. Following a legal challenge, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled to support of the ongoing operation of InSite as an important health service for people who inject drugs. The Court also outlined factors the Minister should consider in granting any future CDSA exemption applications.

We believe the approach outlined in the *Supervised Injection Services Toolkit* reflects the spirit of the Supreme Court decision. It covers a comprehensive range of factors that organizations seeking to implement SIS in Toronto should consider, including the importance of community engagement.

On June 6, 2013, the federal government introduced Bill C-65, the *Respect for Communities Act*, which outlines their expected requirements for groups seeking to apply for a CDSA exemption application. This legislation is still pending. Organizations looking to implement SISs can submit exemption applications at any time guided by the factors set out in the Supreme Court ruling. The *Supervised Injection Services Toolkit* is a resource that can assist those organizations in planning effective services.

Sincerely,

Councillor Gord Perks