

19 November 2020

To: Budget Committee
City of Toronto

From: Jane Greer/Leo Mitterni
on behalf of the Board of Directors

Re: 2021 COVID Budget Request

Hassle Free Clinic is one of three independent clinics funded by the City of Toronto to provide comprehensive sexual health clinical and counselling services. All three clinics, IWHC, Birth Control and Sexual Health Centre and Hassle Free Clinic have remained open during the pandemic to address the sexual health needs of at-risk populations. Due to the closure of Toronto Public Health clinics, with the exception of Crossways, the demand on our services is huge. We have worked hard to meet the needs of our patients during this time, but like everywhere, our priority is to ensure patient, physician and staff safety.

We are currently operating six days per week, all-genders, by appointment only, offering clinical services with physicians, clinicians and counsellors. In addition, we are offering three evenings per week with two counsellors dedicated to GBMSM HIV testing and a self-testing STI program. We are expanding this for the month of December to include Sundays.

All of these services are currently booked 2 – 3 weeks in advance, though we triage people for their urgent contraceptive needs, STI symptoms and treatment. This is challenging, as, anecdotally many general practitioners are virtually ordering tests, then sending their patients to us for treatment. From July to September, Q-3, we diagnosed 568 STIs. The consequences to our patients and community will be great if we have to reduce clinical access.

The measures we must take to ensure safety have ongoing costs. All of our open hours require a screener. Pre-pandemic, we also enjoyed the services of a full-time Public Health Nurse who ensured treatment and follow up with STI-positive patients. This role is now being covered by staff. For 2020, Hassle Free is covering these extra costs. Without assistance for 2021, existing staff will have to fill these roles, leading to a reduction in clinical services.

We assume the overwhelming demand for services will continue, particularly with the City clinics still closed and access issues with family doctors. We urge to you to grant this request to allow us to continue to safely serve our communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

