



Toronto Board of Health Meeting - Deputation Remarks on Provincial Defunding of SCS

from Gab Laurence, Director of Harm Reduction Services at Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre

November 24, 2025

On October 23, 2025, the province announced it would terminate all funding for the Parkdale Supervised Consumption Service (SCS) within 30 days. This decision signifies a devastating abdication of the province's duty to protect public health. To withdraw a proven, life-saving service with only 30 days notice is not only shortsighted, but it is an inhumane act that will have fatal consequences. We are profoundly alarmed by this decision as it demonstrates reckless disregard for human life. The inevitable outcome of this closure is the preventable loss of human life.

This announcement follows last year's closure of three Toronto SCS sites (ten across Ontario) that were located within 200 meters of schools or daycares, including our site at 168 Bathurst Street. Since those closures, demand at the Parkdale SCS has grown by more than 60%, with 360 new clients relying on the service. This surge reflects the urgent need for accessible harm-reduction supports as homelessness and drug toxicity continue to worsen.

The PQWCHC Board and staff made every effort to keep this life-saving service open, including requesting more time from the province. But with funding cut and the risks of operating without provincial and federal approval, we could not find a viable way forward. With grief and anger, we were forced to end Supervised Consumption Services on November 22, 2025. We also believe that provincial influence led Health Canada to revoke our federal exemption to operate.

Supervised Consumption Services save lives. They prevent fatal overdoses, reduce the spread of infectious diseases, connect people to housing and treatment, and reduce public drug use and discarded equipment. Closing them will not stop drug use—it will simply make it more dangerous, more visible, and more costly for emergency services and neighbourhoods.

The Ministry says the funding cut is part of its plan to invest in new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hubs. While we support expanded treatment options, these hubs cannot replace community-based harm-reduction services. People need a full continuum of care. Closing SCS sites before alternatives exist is not a transition plan—it is a public-health disaster.

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Some residents near the site have raised concerns about safety, including public drug use, discarded equipment, and visible homelessness. These issues are real, but they are not caused by the SCS. They are happening across Toronto and across Ontario, including in neighbourhoods with no SCS at all. What we need are emergency shelters, supportive housing with harm-reduction supports, and community safety strategies built with input from both housed and unhoused residents.

The Minister has said the defunding decision is due to complaints and increased crime. However, Toronto Police neighbourhood data shows *decreasing* overall crime in South Parkdale. Public health decisions should be based on evidence, not on who speaks the loudest. Unfortunately, opposition to harm-reduction services is growing, while few are calling for the systemic action that would actually address homelessness and the drug-toxicity crisis. This leaves community agencies to absorb the backlash.

PQWCHC urges the government to reinstate funding, invest in real community safety solutions, and follow evidence—including the recommendations of Ontario’s own Chief Medical Officer of Health, who emphasized in 2023 that harm-reduction services, including SCS, are essential to reducing drug-related harm.

Our focus now is supporting clients and the community through this forced closure. Our transition plan includes:

- Helping hundreds of clients connect with other services
- Expanding mobile overdose-prevention supports
- Launching a mobile and drop-in substance-use care team to provide ongoing clinical care and overdose prevention in South Parkdale

We will look to the City and the federal Emergency Treatment Fund to help fill the gap. The closure of this and other sites will put lives at risk. Ontario continues to lose about 200 people every month to the toxic drug crisis. The government’s decision to defund and close SCS sites will only deepen this tragedy.

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