

# THE ONTARIO SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES FEASIBILITY STUDY

*Here are some questions and answers to help you respond to any inquiries about the study:*

## ABOUT THE ONTARIO SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES FEASIBILITY STUDY

### WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

This study assessed the feasibility of providing supervised injection services in Thunder Bay and London, Ontario. We wanted to learn whether people who inject drugs in these cities would use the services, and we wanted to talk to community members, including business leaders, law enforcement, and government officials, about any concerns they might have. The information we collected will determine whether supervised injection services will help respond to public health and public order concerns in these cities.

### WHY WERE THUNDER BAY AND LONDON SELECTED FOR THIS STUDY?

#### **Thunder Bay**

There were 29 deaths due to drug toxicity, and drug-and-alcohol toxicity in Thunder Bay in 2013. In 2014, Balmoral Withdrawal Management Services had 2,573 admissions for withdrawal management, an increase of 94% over 2013. Thunder Bay has one of the busiest needle exchange programs in the province with well over 3,000 contacts for services.

These numbers indicate that Thunder Bay has high rates of drug use and high rates of people seeking help for drug use. Exploring the fit of supervised injection services, as recommended by the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy, could be an element supporting enhanced harm reduction services in the community.

#### **London**

Emergency room visits related to opioid drug use in London are 1.5 times higher than the national average. Paramedics responded to 600 overdose-related calls in 2013. The Regional HIV/AIDS Connection estimates that there are close to 6,000 clients using its needle exchange program, making it the busiest program in Ontario on a per capita basis.

While HIV rates among people who inject drugs in London are lower than the national average, hepatitis C rates are higher. Supervised injection services could be one way to address higher hepatitis C rates, fatal and near-fatal overdoses, and other health and community concerns in London.

## ABOUT SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES IN CANADA

### WHAT ARE SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES?

Supervised injection services allow people to inject drugs in safe and hygienic conditions under the supervision of nurses or other healthcare staff. They provide access to clean injection equipment. People who use the services can also receive basic medical care and ask for referrals to other health and addiction services.

## ARE SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES AVAILABLE IN CANADA?

Yes. Two organizations in Vancouver provide supervised injection services: Insite and the Dr. Peter Centre. Both centres operate under a unique set of rules and regulations approved by Health Canada. There are also more than 90 established sites in Western Europe and Australia.

## HOW DO SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES PROMOTE HEALTH?

Among people who inject drugs, supervised injection services help reduce rates of HIV, hepatitis C, injection related wounds and infections, and fatal and non-fatal overdoses by reducing injecting in public spaces and facilitating access to programs, including addiction treatment. While supervised injection services don't solve the complex and long-standing problems associated with substance use, they help reduce health risks and can be part of a larger strategy to address addiction, and can help get people into addiction treatment.

## ARE SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES THE SAME THING AS “SHOOTING GALLERIES”?

No, supervised injection services are not “shooting galleries.” They are legally sanctioned services that allow people to inject pre-obtained drugs in a stress-free atmosphere, under hygienic and low-risk conditions. No illicit substances can be acquired on the premises. If an overdose occurs, health care professionals are able to intervene immediately. People can also receive wound care, immunizations, and referrals to other addiction and support services.

## HOW DO COMMUNITIES BENEFIT FROM HAVING SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES?

Studies have shown that supervised injection services have positive impacts on the communities where they are located. Supervised injection services have been shown to:

- reduce the risk of HIV transmission and overdose deaths
- increase the use of addiction treatment services
- reduce the extent of injection drug use in public places
- reduce the amount of injection-related litter in public places.

## ARE THE SERVICES CONTROVERSIAL?

The services sometimes attract public controversy, but they are well-accepted among doctors and scientists as promoting individual and population-wide health. Supervised injection services are exempted by Health Canada from section 56 of the *Controlled Drug and Substances Act*. In 2011, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the services are legal healthcare programs given their proven ability to promote health and public order.

## DO SUPERVISED INJECTION SERVICES LEAD TO INCREASED DRUG USE OR CRIME?

No. Extensive research shows that these services do not cause former users to relapse and they don't cause non-users to start. They do not prevent people from quitting drugs or seeking addiction treatment. They also do not lead to increases in drug-related crime, arrest rates for drug trafficking, assaults or robberies.

## WHO CONDUCTED THE STUDY?

The study was overseen by principal investigators Dr. Thomas Kerr and Dr. Sean B. Rourke. Dr. Kerr is Co-Director of the Urban Health Research Initiative at the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and Professor, Department of Medicine at the University of British Columbia. He also served as the main evaluator of Insite in Vancouver. Dr. Rourke is a Scientist with Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto and Scientific and Executive Director of the Ontario HIV Treatment Network.

The study was supported by the [Ontario HIV Treatment Network](#) and funded by the [Canadian Institutes of Health Research Centre for REACH in HIV/AIDS](#). The OHTN conducts HIV research and provides education, capacity building, evaluation services, data collection and monitoring for HIV services in Ontario. The CIHR Centre for REACH in HIV/AIDS is a nation-wide network focused on intervention research and applied program science in HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, and other sexually transmitted and bloodborne infections.

In London, the study was supported by the [Regional HIV/AIDS Connection](#), a community-based organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for individuals and communities living with or affected by the challenges associated with HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C.

In Thunder Bay, the study was supported by the [Thunder Bay Drug Strategy](#), a coalition of more than 30 partner agencies and members of the lived experience community working to implement a five-pillar drug strategy in Thunder Bay.

## MEDIA CONTACTS

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