

Supervised Injection Services at Ottawa Public Health (OPH)

Frequently Asked Questions – OPH website

Q1. What are supervised injection services?

A1. OPH is planning to enhance its existing harm reduction services by adding an interim supervised injection service (SIS) to its existing services for people who inject drugs (OPH's Site program at 179 Clarence Street). Supervised injection services are health services that provide a hygienic environment for people to inject pre-obtained drugs under supervision.

Supervised injection services have four (4) main goals^{1 2}

1. To reduce spread of infectious diseases (HIV and hepatitis C);
2. To reduce the number of drug overdose deaths;
3. To bring people who inject drugs into contact with other health and social and treatment services; and,
4. To reduce issues in the community such as drug use in public places, and discarded needles.

In addition to supervised injection, individuals are provided with sterile injection supplies, education on safer injection, overdose prevention and intervention, medical and counselling services, and referrals to drug treatment, housing, income support and other services.

Q2. Why do we need supervised injection services in Ottawa?

A2. Research has concluded that Ottawa would benefit from multiple supervised injection services (SIS) that are integrated into health services already working with people who inject drugs. Conditions in Ottawa support the need for SIS.

Rates of HIV (10%) and hepatitis C (70%) infection among people who inject drugs in Ottawa are higher than for the general population.³ In addition, twenty-five percent of people who inject drugs usually or always inject in public places and 19% report sometimes injecting in a public place⁴.

A total of 48 Ottawa residents died from unintentional drug overdose in 2015, 29 (60%) of which were due to opioids such as fentanyl, oxycodone, and morphine.⁵ Between 2000 and 2015, the rate of death due to unintentional drug overdose from any drug increased 23% in Ottawa. Unintentional overdose deaths due to opioids were 2.7 times higher during 2009–2015 (24 per year) compared to 2003–2008 (9 per year). For more drug use and overdose statistics, see [OPH's website](#). Recent anecdotal information from community groups and service agencies are reporting increased numbers of overdoses and deaths. Even though many of these overdoses are not seen in emergency departments, there were nearly 700 drug overdose-related Emergency Department visits during the first half of 2017.

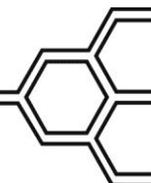
¹ Strike, C et al. (2012). Toronto and Ottawa Supervised Consumption Assessment Study. Available online: <http://www.stmichaelshospital.com/pdf/research/SMH-TOSCA-report.pdf>

² Fischer, B et al. (2002). Safer injection facilities (SIFs) for injection drug users (IDUs) in Canada, Canadian Journal of Public Health, 93(3), 336-338

³ I-Track, HIV & HCV Prevention Research Team, University of Ottawa, 2015.

⁴ Findings of the Ottawa Harm Reduction Needs Assessment Report, Ottawa Public Health, 2014

⁵ Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, extracted June 7, 2016.



Q3. Are other supervised injection services operating in Ottawa?

A3. Currently there are three proposed SIS for Ottawa (Sandy Hill CHC; Somerset West CHC; Ottawa Inner City Health). Each must apply to the Federal Government to receive an exemption from the federal Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) in order to operate. Sandy Hill CHC is currently the only agency that has received approval and is planning to open in late October 2017. There is also a peer-led, outdoor “pop up” SIS that started operations in late August 2017. This “pop up” has not received exemption approval.

Q4. Why is supervised injection service needed at Ottawa Public Health at this time? Why do we need supervised injection service if we already have harm reduction services such as needle and syringe programs?

A4. OPH works with over 20 community agencies to provide harm reduction services in Ottawa and is actively working with municipal and community agencies to address the opioid crisis in our community, which includes increasing overdose peer support in the community and ensuring naloxone is readily available to prevent overdoses.

Supervised injection services will improve harm reduction services that are currently offered in Ottawa. SIS provide a safe, clean, indoor, supervised environment for people to inject with an opportunity for safer drug use teaching, overdose prevention support, and referral to counselling, withdrawal management, and addiction and other health care services. Without a safe place to inject, people may inject in isolation thereby increasing the risk of overdose death and/or may inject in public spaces. Injecting in public is not only an issue for people who are homeless, but people living in shared accommodation or shelters may be afraid of losing their accommodation if they inject on the premises, so they turn to public spaces.⁶ Research has found that people who inject drugs will only travel short distances (i.e. a few city blocks) to use health services, including supervised injection services.⁷ ⁸ This rapid response will allow OPH to address the ever-growing public health issue and the continued need for opioid overdose prevention services.

Q5. How will the supervised injection service at OPH work?

A5. We anticipate that the majority of people who use the service will be existing clients of OPH’s Site program. Clients will arrive at the program with pre-obtained drugs. Each person will be assessed to ensure they are eligible for the program. They will be given sterile injecting equipment and instruction on safer injecting practices. A nurse will then supervise their injection in a room dedicated for this purpose, and intervene in the case of any medical emergencies. Once the individual has injected their drugs, they will be directed to a waiting area, and encouraged to stay for 15 minutes to be observed for any negative drug reactions. The client will also receive information and referrals about other health and social supports. This small-scale service will have 2 injection booths and will be located in the Site program’s existing location at 179 Clarence Street. SIS will be staffed by public health nurses trained in supervised injection and overdose response, outreach/social workers, and Peer Educators.

⁶ Toronto Public Health. (2013). Supervised Injection Services Toolkit. Available online: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-59914.pdf>

⁷ Toronto Public Health. (2013). Supervised Injection Services Toolkit. Available online: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-59914.pdf>

⁸ Strike, C et al. (2012). Toronto and Ottawa Supervised Consumption Assessment Study. Available online: <http://www.stmichaelshospital.com/pdf/research/SMH-TOSCA-report.pdf>

Q6. Why is the supervised injection service at OPH considered ‘interim’?

A6. OPH’s interim SIS will be offered in partnership with Sandy Hill Community Health Centre (SHCHC), under SHCHC’s approved Health Canada exemption to operate.

Q7. What are the benefits of supervised injection services?

A7. International and Canadian research shows that supervised injections services have benefits both for individuals using the services and for the community, including:

- Reducing the number of drug overdoses and deaths;
- Reducing risk factors leading to infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis;
- Increasing the use of detox and drug treatment services;
- Connecting people with other health and social services;
- Reducing the amount of publicly discarded needles;
- Cost-effectiveness; and,
- Not contributing to crime or increased drug use in the local community.

Q8. Are supervised injection services legal?

A8. Yes. In Canada, supervised injection services operate through an exemption under Section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA). The exemption allows health services to operate without the risk that its clients or staff will be charged for the crime of having illegal drugs. Exemptions are granted by the federal Minister of Health in situations that are seen as “necessary for medical or scientific purpose or is otherwise in the public interest”.⁹

Q9. Won't these services just encourage more drug use?

A9. People do not start injecting drugs because of the availability of supervised injection services. There is no evidence that harm reduction services promote drug use. Supervised injection services are used mainly by people with a long history of injection drug use. Research has also found that supervised injection services do not cause people to relapse (e.g., start using drugs after a period of abstinence) or prevent people from stopping drug use altogether.

Q10. Will the supervised injection service increase crime in the neighbourhood or threaten public health and safety?

A10. Research has shown that harm reduction programs do not increase public disorder or threaten public safety. In fact, they tend to have the opposite effect. Supervised injection services are located in neighbourhoods where there is a demonstrated need, usually where drug use is already having an impact on the community. Harm reduction programs have a positive impact on public health and safety by:

- Preventing blood-borne infections such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C among people using drugs
- Ensuring that more needles and syringes are disposed of safely through programs, rather than discarded in the community
- Supporting agreements between police and harm reduction services that ensure drug trafficking laws are enforced. This creates an environment where open drug dealing is discouraged, and people who use drugs are encouraged to access needed services.

⁹ Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. (S.C. 1996, c.19).

Q11. How will OPH ensure public and community safety for individuals in the neighbourhood who are not SIS clients?

A11. OPH is working closely with Ottawa Police Services (OPS), Corporate Security and Ottawa Community Housing to ensure safety for staff, clients, and surrounding community.

Q 12 Will there be an opportunity for community input?

A12. OPH conducted a public consultation in Summer 2016 (see report for [results](#) of the consultation). Among the consultation's findings:

- 66% of respondents thought that having supervised injection services available would be beneficial.
- 60% of respondents thought that offering harm reduction services in more areas of the city would be beneficial.

Feedback, comments, questions from the public are always welcome using your choice of communications channel. Contact information [here](#).