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Health Canada Grants the Necessary Exemptions from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for the Opening of Three New Supervised Injection Service Locations in Toronto

Today marks a huge milestone, as long-time advocates and providers of harm reduction services: South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC) and Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre - Queen West site, celebrate the approval of our federal exemption application approvals to allow supervised injection services as part of our health service programming. A third agency in Toronto also received approval today to offer supervised injection services: The Works – Toronto Public Health. This is an important next step in our ability to expand our harm reduction programming and one that will help to address the current overdose epidemic in Ontario. National statistics of death caused by overdoses in Canada was estimate at 2300 people in 2016 and in Ontario it has been estimated that at least 2 people die of overdoses every day.

Evidence from injection sites around the world has demonstrated that these life-saving services will not only prevent the transmission of communicable diseases but will also decrease avoidable trips to emergency rooms and decrease overdose deaths. Supervised injection is a health services that provides a hygienic environment and supplies for people to inject pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of a nurse. Community Health Centre's such as SRCHC and Queen West are well equipped to address the needs of people who are at risk or face barriers to accessing health care services and supports. Both Health Centres have a long history of providing programs and services to people who use drugs and see this as an expansion of the work we are already doing. Current programs and services include health care and social supports including: needle and stem kit distribution, safer drug use education, naloxone distribution, outreach, Hep C treatment and support, group programs (cooking, art), practical supports (legal clinics, income assistance), primary health care, health promotion and community initiatives.

“SRCHC has provided user driven harm reduction services for 20 years. We have listened to, worked with and struggled with people who use drugs to provide every possible opportunity for health, fairness, and equity. The ability to offer SIS is one more step in this journey and we know that this is one small part of a response to the current overdose crisis and an acknowledgement that the war on drugs must end.”

-Jason Altenberg, South Riverdale Community Health Centre, Program Director

“This is an important achievement for harm reduction advocates. Integrated supervised injection services at Queen West will be a life-saving addition to our harm reduction services. We see SIS as a much needed public health response to an individual and public health concern. We look forward to working with the clients and our communities in the implementation of this valuable service.”

-Angela Robertson, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, Executive Director

If you would like more information or have any questions, please contact:

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