

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about Supervised Injection Service at Queen West

Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, 168 Bathurst Street



“Integrated SIS 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

What is Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre

Parkdale Queen West CHC (PQWCHC) is an accredited community-based health and wellness service governed by a Board of Directors. PQWCHC was formed in April 2017 through the successful amalgamation of Queen West – Central Toronto CHC and Parkdale CHC, combined we have over 70 years of experience providing care to our communities. We are one of 73 Community Health Centers (CHCs) across Ontario, all of which have inter-professional teams of service providers including physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers/counsellors, health promoters and community workers. For over 40 years, the Queen West site has worked to improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities who are at risk and/or face barriers to accessing high quality health care services and supports. Priority is given to low-income people, adults and youths who are homeless and street-involved, people living with substance use issues, people living with mental health issues, immigrants and refugees.

What services are provided at Queen West site?

Queen West offers a broad range of services including medical and dental care, health promotion, counselling and mental health supports, HIV and Hepatitis C supports, treatment and education, anonymous HIV testing, wellness groups, practical supports (ID clinic, Voicemails, etc.), harm reduction including needle, stem kit and naloxone distribution, and illness prevention, advocacy, and community engagement and development. In addition, we provide referrals to a range of services and supports, such as housing and drug treatment.

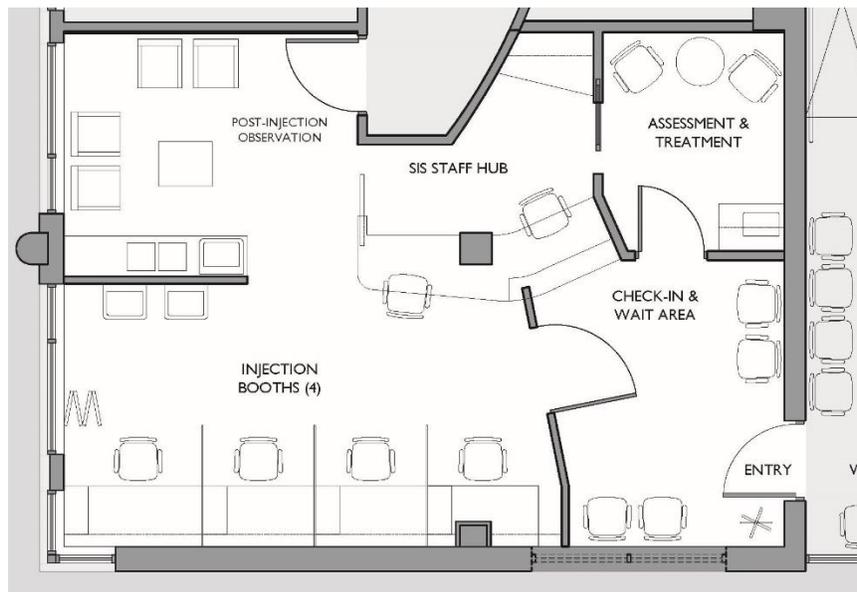
What is a supervised injection service?

Supervised injection services are health services that provide a safer and hygienic environment for people to inject pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of staff. 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.

What is the new service being proposed at Queen West site?

Queen West site is planning to add a small-scale supervised injection service to its existing harm reduction and health services for people who inject drugs. The service will be located on the ground floor within the agency's existing program space. The space for the service will include a dedicated wait area, an intake/reception desk, room for assessment and treatment, an injection room with 4 supervised injection booths and an adjoining post-injection room (chillout lounge). The service will operate during our current health centre hours and will be staffed by a nurse, counsellor and a harm reduction peer worker with a manager for oversight. Most of the people using the service will be existing clients.

SIS Floor Plan



What is the process/timeline for this service at Queen West?

We are currently training our new SIS staff and renovating our space to accommodate this new service. If all goes well, we could begin offering this new service by early March 2018.

Why is a supervised injection service needed at Queen West?

Queen West has been delivering harm reduction in the community for over 20 years. Queen West is one of the busiest needle distribution programs in Toronto. In 2015, we had over 15,000 client visits and distributed almost 300,000 needles. We serve a significant number of people who inject drugs, including people who lack stable housing and engage in high-risk behaviours such as injecting alone, frequently, and in public.

Compared to the City overall, there are disproportionately high numbers of people who inject drugs within their catchment area, as well as higher rates of emergency department visits due to drug use in Toronto.¹ A 2012 study of Queen West harm reduction clients found that 11% had experienced an overdose (in the past 6

¹ Supplemental data based on the TOSCA Study, provided as a personal communication, May 2014, by A. Bayoumi. Derived using geographic data for the years 2004-2008, using multiple administrative health databases including: National Ambulatory Care Reporting System, Discharge Abstract Database, Ontario Public Drugs Benefit Program, and physician billing claims.

months), over a third reported public injecting, 15% said that they inject in public most often, almost a third reported injecting every day, and 29% reported regularly (from one to three or more times a week), 42.5% had evidence of a current/past infection with hepatitis C and 51% did not have stable housing². Queen West clients who participated in studies told researchers and us that they wanted and would use an integrated supervised injection service.

Is this the only neighbourhood where a supervised injection service is being planned?

There are now at least three other agencies in Toronto that are already offering or planning to add supervised injection to their existing health services for people who inject drugs: Toronto Public Health-The Works (277 Victoria Street) began offering this service in August and South Riverdale Community Health Centre (955 Queen St East) began offering this service in November. Fred Victor Centre, a multi-service agency at Queen and Jarvis is also planning to open an SIS. The Toronto Harm Reduction Alliance is currently operating an Overdose Prevention Site (OPS are similar to SIS but with fewer resources and without Health Canada oversight) staffed by volunteers and run out of tents in Moss Park at Queen & Sherbourne. Multiple, small-scale services are needed because drug use is spread out in Toronto and because research has shown that people will not travel very far to use a supervised injection service.

Will the supervised injection service increase crime or drug use in our neighbourhood?

Supervised injection services do not contribute to more crime nor do they encourage increased drug use, initiate new users or increase public order problems by increasing local drug scenes or attracting drug users/dealers from other areas. In fact, studies of the impact of this type of service find that occurrences of things like thefts, vehicle break-ins, discarded needles and drug use in public spaces tend to decrease after they are established. Research in Toronto that has examined the connection between supportive housing programs (which included housing for people who use substances) and property values has found that property values actually increase, along with a reduction in crime.³

We are deeply committed to maintaining a safe environment for our community, staff and clients and will continue to strengthen our current strategies in order to address safety considerations for our community, staff and clients. Strategies include (but are not limited to):

- Zero-tolerance drug trafficking protocol
- Engaging our community stakeholders via our SIS Community Liaison Committee
- Having a designated SIS Contact Person (i.e. SIS manager)
- SIS service delivery and design provisions (i.e. dedicated wait area and post-injection room)
- Regular monitoring of the street outside our Centre (by staff and mounted security cameras)
- Scheduling extra client support workers during the summer and evening hours
- Providing comprehensive and responsive services and supports to clients in need, including crisis intervention, stabilization supports, and community outreach
- Working with local community police officers, participating in 14 Division's Community Police Liaison Committee and establishing protocols with Toronto Police Services

What are the benefits to these services?

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;

² Challacombe L and Millson P. 2012. Toronto I-Track Report. Queen West Central Toronto Community Health Centre Site Report. Public Health Agency of Canada, March 2012.

³ De Wolff, A. (2008). We are Neighbours: The Impact of Supportive Housing on Community, Social, Economic and Attitude Changes. Wellesley Institute: Toronto.

- 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;
- Not contributing to crime or increased drug use in the local community.

What has been the process for establishing this service?

We have been working on developing this service for many years. In March 2016, the Medical Officer of Health recommended that Toronto hold public consultations on the issue of supervised injection services at the 3 proposed locations. Consultations included an online survey, focus groups, meetings and presentations and a series of 4 Open House events that we held at the Centre. The report on the consultation activities that took place throughout April and May was discussed at a Board of Health meeting on July 4/16 where they voted unanimously to support SIS implementation in Toronto. On July 12th, Toronto City Council also discussed SIS and voted 36-3 in favour of its implementation at 3 proposed locations (Dundas Square, Queen/Bathurst and our site at Queen/Carlaw). On December 1/16, we submitted our application to Health Canada to request an exemption from the Controlled Drugs & Substances Act which is required to operate this service without fear of arrest. We received approval from the federal government in June 2017. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has provided financial support for SIS in Toronto.

Is there an opportunity for community input?

Engaging with the local community and providing opportunities to raise any issues or concerns has always been important to PQWCHC. We have created a Community Liaison Committee with diverse community representation, so we can work together to resolve any concerns that may arise.

In addition, our SIS manager is available to respond to community members' concerns and questions. The Centre will also regularly reach out and engage the community in a planned and thoughtful way to ensure they are provided with updates and that concerns are addressed quickly.

Evaluation and data collection

In partnership with the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN), PQWCHC will participate in a coordinated, three-year evaluation with Toronto Public Health/The Works and South Riverdale Community Health Centre. The evaluation will help identify any issues or ongoing concerns and recommend ways to address them.

Monitoring data on patterns of use of the site, drugs being injected, impacts of the service in the community, demographic data of service users, referrals and the uptake of other Centre services will be collected and analyzed.

Where can I get more information about the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre's SIS?

Visit our web site: <http://ctchc.org/>

If you would like more information or have questions, please contact: Lorraine Barnaby, Supervised Injection Service Manager (lbarnaby@ctchc.com), 416-703-8482 ext. 2333 or Anne Marie DiCenso, Director of Urban Health at 416-703-8482. They would be happy to speak to with you, give you a tour or to come meet with your group.