

## 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 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 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 health services for people who inject drugs. This is a different model than Vancouver's InSite. The service will be located on the ground floor within the agency's existing program space with no change to the

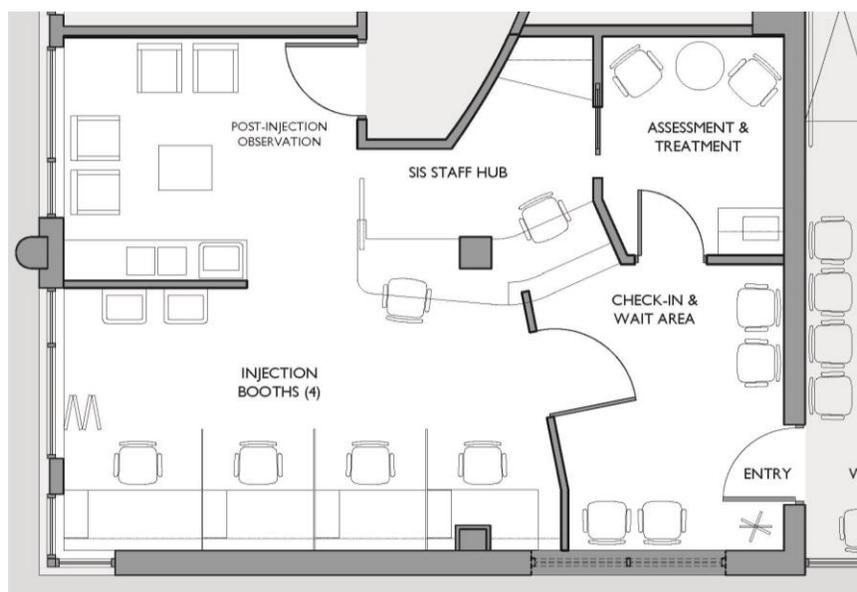
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exterior of the building. The space for the service will include a dedicated wait area, an intake/reception desk, room for assessment and treatment, an injection room with 4 supervised injection booths and an adjoining post-injection room totaling 636.6 sq. ft. of space. The services will be open 6 days per week and hours will be aligned with other services and programs offered at our Centre. It will be staffed at all times 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.

Clients will arrive at the service with pre-obtained drugs. Clients will be registered and assessed to ensure they are eligible for the service. Upon each visit, clients will undergo a pre-injection assessment to determine their current health status, individual needs, safer injection knowledge and ability, risk of drug overdose or other harm and the type/amount of drug they intend to use. Upon completion of the assessment they will be given sterile injecting equipment and instruction on safer injecting practices. SIS staff will then supervise their injection in a room dedicated for this purpose (i.e. injection room), and intervene in the case of any medical emergencies. Once the individual has injected their drugs they will be directed to a post injection room, for users of the services only, where they will continue to be observed for any negative drug reactions.

In addition, injection related first aid will be provided by the nurse (i.e. wound care). Clients of the service will have direct referral access to the Centre's health, dental, counselling and wellness programs and will also receive information and referrals to external health, social and drug treatment supports/services and will be engaged about accessing those resources by SIS staff.

### SIS Floor Plan



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

On June 2, 2017, Health Canada granted the necessary exemptions from the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* for the operation of the three new supervised consumption sites in Toronto. In addition, the provincial government has confirmed funding for both renovations and operations. If all goes well, we could begin offering this new service by December 2017.

### 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<sup>1</sup>. A 2012 study of Queen West harm reduction clients found that 11% had experienced an overdose (in the past 6 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 housing<sup>2</sup>. Queen West clients who participated in studies told researchers and us that they wanted and would use an integrated supervised injection service.

These statistics are clear indicators that there is a need for a continuum of harm reduction supports, including supervised injection services.

### 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.

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

No. There are two other agencies planning to add supervised injection to their existing health services for people who inject drugs: Toronto Public Health-The Works (277 Victoria Street) and South

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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Riverdale Community Health Centre (955 Queen Street East). Multiple, small scale supervised injection services are needed because drug use is spread out in Toronto. Research finds people will only travel a short distance to use a supervised injection service.

### **Will the supervised injection service increase crime in our neighbourhood?**

No. Supervised injection services do not contribute to more crime. They are located in neighbourhoods where there is a demonstrated need, usually where drug use is already having an impact on the community. There is considerable research on this subject. For example, in the neighbourhood around InSite in Vancouver, there has been no increase in crime, and actual decreases in vehicle break-ins and thefts. Australian studies have found decreases in drug-related crime, public drug use and loitering.

### **Will the supervised injection encourage drug use?**

No. There is no evidence that the provision of supervised injection services encourages increased drug use or initiates new users. There is little evidence that by providing better conditions for drug consumption they perpetuate drug use in clients who would otherwise discontinue consuming drugs such as heroin or cocaine, nor that they undermine treatment goals. Research in Europe and Vancouver identifies that when managed in consultation and cooperation with local authorities and police, they do not increase public order problems by increasing local drug scenes or attracting drug users and dealers from other areas.

### **Why do we need supervised injection services in Toronto?**

Research has concluded that Toronto would benefit from multiple supervised injection services that are integrated into health services already working with people who inject drugs. There is a high demand for harm reduction services in Toronto. In 2015, there were over 100,000 client visits to harm reduction services, and almost 1.9 million needles were distributed.

Overdoses in Toronto are on the rise. Total overdose deaths in Toronto reached an all-time high in 2014, increasing 77 per cent over a decade to 258 deaths. Of those, 131 were opioid-related (e.g. heroin and fentanyl), according to a new provincial data-tracking site. That number rose again to 137 opioid deaths in 2015. In the first six months of 2016, the number of deaths totaled 91. Rates of HIV (5%) and hepatitis C (61%) infection among people who inject drugs are much higher than for the general population. In addition, a Toronto study found 36% of people who use drugs reported injecting in public places such as washrooms and alleyways.

### **Are there any 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;
- Reducing risk factors leading to infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis;

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- 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.

### Are there supervised injection services in other cities?

The first supervised injection service opened 30 years ago in Switzerland. Today there are more than 90 supervised injection services, in Europe, Australia and Canada. In Canada, there are multiple supervised injection services in Vancouver and Montreal, and several planned for Ottawa, Thunder Bay, London, Victoria and Edmonton.

### Is anything else being done to address drug issues in Toronto?

Many organizations across the city deliver a broad range of services to reduce the harms of substance use. This includes prevention programs as well as withdrawal management and treatment programs. Toronto also has a City Council-approved drug strategy that provides a comprehensive approach to alcohol and other drugs based on the four integrated components of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and enforcement. Action is being taken across each of these areas. Implementation of supervised injection services will not eliminate harmful drug use, but they are part of the range of strategies to reduce harm. Details about the implementation of the Toronto Drug Strategy are provided every two years in a status report available at [www.tph.to/drugstrategy](http://www.tph.to/drugstrategy).

### Is there an opportunity for community input?

In the spring of 2016, the three Toronto sites hired an independent consulting company (MASS LBP) to conduct community consultations. Input was gathered about SIS in general and for each of the three proposed locations regarding perceived benefits and concerns. Consultation activities took place from March to May, and included website and an online survey ([www.toronto-sis.ca](http://www.toronto-sis.ca)), public events (town halls and open houses), focus groups and information sessions. Activities were promoted via posters, emails, social media/web postings, communications initiated by the agencies, ward Councillors, and direct outreach to local organizations and associations. In addition, all City Councillors received information about the online survey to promote with constituents in their wards. Queen West also conducted additional consultation activities during this time period with parent councils of local school, local business improvement groups, other client groups at the Centre, health and social service partners, nearby residents and the general public. The report on our combined consultation activities and findings can be found in the June 16, 2016 *Board of Health Report – Implementing Supervised Injection Services in Toronto (see Appendix H)*.

Queen West wants to continue to be a good neighbour and build on the strong community relationships we have now. Engaging with the local community is an important part of the process of

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implementing this new service. We want to ensure people have accurate information about the service, and an opportunity to raise any issues or concerns that need to be addressed.

A community Liaison Committee (CLS) will be created. The role of the CLC will be to act as a forum for the service and local neighbours to freely exchange information, discuss issues and work towards constructive ongoing communication and outcomes. The goal will be to contribute to the success of the SIS for the service, the clients of the service and the broader community. Representation would include but not be limited to local BIAs and/or other businesses, Residents' Association(s), schools and health and social service providers, and Board, clients and staff of Queen West, and Toronto Police Service (14 Division).

In addition, Queen West will have a designated contact person who community members can call with concerns and who would be available to facilitate a response. 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. A variety of methods, including sharing information via Queen West web site and display boards within the health centre, attending meetings of the Community Policing Liaison Committee, the BIAs, local Residents Associations, etc., hosting community meetings and providing tours of the SIS will be utilized to share implementation and operational information (including health and safety protocols and mechanisms) and gather input.

### **Evaluation and data collection**

In partnership with the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN), Queen West 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. The evaluation will include consultation with people using the service and other community stakeholders and will look at service impacts and satisfaction indicators.

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 SIS?**

Visit the Queen West web site <http://ctchc.org/programs-services/harm-reduction/integrated-supervised-injection-service-pilot/>

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact: Angela Robertson, Executive Director ([arobertson@ctchc.com](mailto:arobertson@ctchc.com)), 416-703-8482 or Lorraine Barnaby, Supervised Injection Services Manager ([lbarnaby@ctchc.com](mailto:lbarnaby@ctchc.com)), 416-703-8482.