

## PRESS CONFERENCE – MARCH 14, 2016

### Press Statement from Queen West – Central Toronto Community Health Centre

By Angela Robertson, Executive Director (CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Queen West – Central Toronto Community Health Centre is one of 73 community health centres across Ontario and for over 45 years we have provided comprehensive primary health and wellness services, including medical and dental, harm reduction, counselling and case management and health promotion to our community. We work with individuals and communities who are at risk and/or face barriers to accessing quality health care services. Individuals' living with substance use issues is a priority population in our work.

For over 20 years we have provided harm reduction services and supports to people who use drugs. We operate one of the busiest needle distribution programs in West-Toronto. We offer a range of services to people who use drugs, including: medical care, counselling, needle distribution, HIV and Hepatitis C supports, education and treatment, anonymous HIV testing, health promotion and education. A supervised injection service is an extension of that support to clients who we already serve. We know that there are clients who are vulnerable and at risk of unsafe use; using alone and risking overdose; and clients who are homeless and under-housed using in public washrooms and in secluded areas where they and others could be at risk.

We have long reflected on the value of nurse-led integrated supervised injection services for people who inject illicit drugs. We participated in the 2012 Toronto and Ottawa Supervised Consumption Assessment Study (TOSCA) and the Public Health Agency of Canada I-TRACK SURVEY<sup>i</sup>. The survey found that a significant number of Queen West clients are injecting in public spaces.

- Over a third of clients reported public injecting in the past six months,
- 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).
- 11% had overdosed; 42.5% had evidence of a current/past Hep C infection
- 51% did not have stable housing

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Queen West clients who participated in the studies told researchers and our centre that they wanted and would use an integrated supervised injection service if it was made available.

An integrated supervised injection service at Queen West would be a small addition to our harm reduction and health services, with three supervised injection booths and an adjoining post-injection observation area (no more than 500 sq. ft. of space).

We recognize that not all individuals are ready or able to stop using drugs; therefore integrated supervised injection services are an important part of a public health approach that can reduce the harms associated with injection drug use while increasing access to health services for people who are highly stigmatized and marginalized. All lives are important and nurse supervised injection services saves lives. They are a public health response to an individual and public health concern.

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<sup>i</sup> I-Track is an enhanced surveillance system that monitors the prevalence of HIV, Hepatitis C and other related infections as well as the associated risk behaviours among people who inject drugs.