

Overdose Prevention Sites

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the risks associated with drug use?

Drug use affects us all. Injection drug use is an important public health issue that has significant impact on members of our community who use drugs, their families and the broader community. These impacts include death and disability from overdose, the spread of infectious diseases, poor mental health and addictions, unstable housing, incarceration, injection-related litter and the degradation of public spaces.

What is harm reduction?

Harm Reduction acknowledges that people use drugs and works to decrease the harms caused by drug use through interventions to decrease the health effects and keep individuals, families, and the community safer. *Immediate goals of harm reduction* include saving lives, decreasing disease and improving public spaces; while *longer-term goals* may help clients to better engage in the health or social service system leading to the potential to decrease or stop drug misuse.

What is an Overdose Prevention Site?

Overdose Prevention Sites provide easy-to-access, life-saving harm reduction services in a stigma-free environment to help reduce the growing number of opioid-related overdose deaths. The services provide:

- Supervised injection
- Harm reduction supplies (ie: clean needles and syringes), including disposal of used supplies
- Naloxone, overdose prevention and intervention in the case of an overdose

Overdose Prevention Sites that meet the necessary criteria can be approved to operate for three to six months, with the possibility of extension. They are funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Are Overdose Prevention Sites legal?

Yes. In Canada, the legal operation of a supervised injection site requires Federal Government approval, granted by the federal Minister of Health for legal exemption under section 56 of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)*. The federal government announced changes that expanded the ability of provinces to respond to the escalating opioid crisis. Under federal policy, provinces experiencing a public health emergency can request an exemption under federal law for temporary Overdose Prevention Sites. In response to this federal change in policy, Ontario's Minister of Health wrote a letter to the Federal Health Minister recognizing the public health emergency in Ontario due to the opioid crisis, and formally requested that the federal government allow Ontario to approve and fund overdose prevention sites.

What is the purpose of these services?

Supervised Injection Sites (SIS) or Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) are part of a larger harm reduction approach that supports health as a human right. These services are locations where people take pre-obtained drugs and inject them in a clean environment under the supervision of trained staff. Research has demonstrated benefits of SIS for communities and people who inject drugs. An SIS/OPS aims to:

- Save lives by reducing the number of fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses by providing education of safer use practices, overdose prevention and intervention.
- Reduce the spread of infectious diseases like HIV and hepatitis C amongst people who inject drugs by providing sterile injection supplies.
- Connect people who use drugs with other health, treatment and social services like housing and other supports.
- Create a safer community by reducing drug use in public spaces and publically discarded needles.

What is the difference between overdose prevention sites and supervised injection/consumption sites?

Generally the difference between an overdose prevention site and a supervised injection (consumption) site is the type of services offered and permanency of the service. Overdose prevention sites are time limited, temporary locations that provide supervised injection/consumption, clean and sterile injection supplies, while also administering naloxone, a life-saving drug, in the event of an overdose. Supervised Injection/Consumption Sites offer the same services but are permanent. They also include referral to community supports and services as well as primary care.

Are other jurisdictions doing this?

Yes. In February 2018, London opened Ontario's first legal Temporary Overdose Prevention Site. Other cities/agencies are pursuing funding for sites as well.

In Canada there are over 20 Supervised Consumption Sites that are currently operational.

Where will this service be located?

Shelter Health Network is working with community partners to find a suitable location for a temporary Overdose Prevention Site within Ward 2 for the duration of its operational period.

A suitable location for an overdose prevention site would be within the geographic area identified by Hamilton's Supervised Injection Site Needs Assessment & Feasibility Study: in the area of Barton (north), Ferguson Ave (East), Main Street (south), Queen Street (west).

How will the overdose prevention site model work?

The temporary site would operate from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. seven days per week with three staff on site at all times.

Who are the staff, are they trained?

The staff will all be trained in CPR and naloxone administration and will receive special training in mental health crisis management. There will be one health care professional on site at all times (usually a nurse or a doctor). There will also be workers trained in harm reduction and a peer worker with lived experience.

How would Hamilton benefit from an overdose prevention site?

First and foremost, this service will save lives.

Accidental fatal and non-fatal overdoses are increasing each year in Hamilton. Preliminary data indicate that in January through October 2017 there were opioid-related deaths 75 deaths compared to 41 in the same period in 2016 – an 80% increase.

In 2017 the incidence rate of hepatitis C in Hamilton was 42.9 cases / 100,000, 27% higher than the provincial rate. Among cases diagnosed between 2012-2016, 47% reported injection drug use behaviour. Between 2004 and 2012, an average of 11 Hamilton residents died every year due to chronic hepatitis C.

Locally Opioids have had considerable impact on use of health care services. Hamilton's opioid-related hospitalization rate is almost double the provincial rate, as is the rate of emergency department visits.

The addition of these services in the community has the potential to effectively decrease unsafe injection practices like needle sharing that can spread disease, decrease accidental death and disability from overdose, and decrease public injecting and litter by providing a clean and safe place for people to inject drugs.