

Dear Neighbours,

Overdose is not something we talk about often, but it is a serious public health issue. Hundreds of people are dying in our city each year due to overdose - and these are preventable deaths. We are writing to you today to give you comprehensive information regarding a public health initiative in our community that will save lives and make our communities safer. We are also asking that you **save the date for a public meeting on Thursday April 14, 7pm at the Scadding Court Community Centre (707 Dundas Street West).**

On Monday March 14, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David McKeown, announced next steps for public health promotion in our city, with the recommendation to introduce small-scale, nurse supervised injection services within existing medical facilities in Toronto. Dr. McKeown has requested the Board of Health approve a public consultation process on this and that is why we are holding April 14 for a meeting.

Three sites - Queen West-Central Toronto Community Health Centre, Toronto Public Health-The Works, and South Riverdale Community Health Centre - will be applying for Federal exemptions to operate nurse supervised injection services in their communities. Nurse supervised injection services already exist in other major cities. These services will add to the range of initiatives currently underway to address the growing overdose crisis in our city that includes prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and enforcement.

The Queen West Health Centre is located at Bathurst and Richmond Street and has been a part of our neighbourhood for decades. It is home to many doctors' offices, counselling services, community programs, and harm reduction services. As part of their harm reduction services, Queen West currently operates a needle exchange program where users can pick up clean needles and return used ones.

Queen West, along with other health centres, is asking the Federal Government for permission to set up three small, nurse supervised booths within their health centres where users would inject pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of a nurse. This would allow the nurse to provide clean supplies, education on safer injection, overdose prevention and intervention, medical and counselling services, and referrals to drug treatment, housing, income support and other services.

Nurse supervised injection services, even ones as small as the one being proposed at the Queen West Health Centre, will help prevent deaths due to overdose and reduce the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C. It will also make our communities safer by reducing issues such as public injecting and discarded needles.

Please take the time to read through this flyer. You can visit [mikelayton.to/public\\_health](http://mikelayton.to/public_health) or [joecressy.com/public\\_health](http://joecressy.com/public_health) for ongoing information. Contact us any time if you have any questions.



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**We can provide this information in other languages:**

- 如需詳細中文信息, 請致電 416.338.3344
- Para informações em Português contatar Ashley Da Silva 416-392-4010
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## What is Queen West – Central Toronto Community Health Centre (Queen West)?

The Queen West Health Centre has been operating in the community for over 45 years and at 168 Bathurst (Bathurst and Richmond) since 1997.

Queen West is an accredited community-based health and wellness service with inter-professional teams of service providers including doctors, nurse practitioners, social workers/counsellors, health promoters, and community workers. They work 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 youth who are homeless and street-involved, people living with substance use issues, people living with mental health issues, immigrants, and refugees.

Visit their website [www.ctchc.org](http://www.ctchc.org) for more information and to contact them directly.



## What services are provided at the Queen West Health Centre?

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 and education, anonymous HIV testing, wellness groups, practical supports (legal and housing), harm reduction including needle distribution and illness prevention, advocacy, and community engagement and development.

## What is a nurse supervised injection service?

Nurse supervised injection services are health services that provide a clean environment for people to inject pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of a nurse. In addition to nurse 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.

Over 90 nurse supervised injection services exist in Europe, Australia, and Canada, but each city offers them differently. The model proposed for Toronto is unique to meet the needs of our city. Very small-scale, nurse supervised injection services, of only three booths, are being proposed at a few different existing medical facilities throughout the city.



Photo: Example of small-scale nurse supervised injection service at the Dr. Peter Centre in Vancouver. These are 3 booths, similar in size to what is being proposed at Queen West Health Centre.

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

Queen West is asking the Federal Government for an exemption so that they can add a very small-scale, nurse supervised injection service – three small booths (see photo) - to their existing health services for people who inject drugs. The service will be located within the agency's existing program space with no change to the exterior of the building. The service will occupy less than 500 square feet of their existing 26,000 square foot facility at Richmond and Bathurst.

They are looking to add three small booths within their building where a nurse can supervise people injecting pre-obtained drugs, to provide sterilized supplies, provide education and counselling support including referrals to drug treatment, and to help prevent overdose as well as the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C.

## Why is a supervised injection service needed at Queen West?

Queen West has been delivering harm reduction and health services at Bathurst and Richmond for decades. They serve a significant number of people who inject substances, including people engaged in high-risk behaviours such as injecting alone and sometimes in public. The Queen West Health Centre at Bathurst and Richmond is one of the busiest needle distribution programs in Toronto. In 2015, they had over 15,000 client visits and distributed almost 300,000 needles. They also collected over 300,000 used needles. Rather than picking up, injecting potentially in public, and then returning needles, now people will be able to inject under the

supervision of a nurse. This will provide Queen West with the opportunity to offer other services including referral for treatment.

### **Will this help keep needles out of our parks and public spaces?**

Yes. More than a third of Queen West's clients report injecting in public spaces such as alleyways and public bathrooms. This service will also make our communities safer by reducing issues such as public injecting and needles being left behind. We hear stories from our neighbours and our parks ambassadors of used needles in public parks, playgrounds, and coffee shop washrooms. Nurse supervised injection services will reduce this significantly, as those who use drugs are brought indoors and provided with clean and safe places to dispose of needles and other materials, as well as counselling and medical support.

### **Where else are nurse supervised injection sites being proposed in Toronto?**

There are three agencies planning to add small-scale, nurse supervised injection to their existing health services for people who inject drugs. The other two agencies are *The Works* (277 Victoria St, Yonge and Dundas) run by City of Toronto's Public Health Agency and the South Riverdale Community Health Centre (955 Queen Street East).

Multiple nurse supervised injection services are needed because drug use is spread out in Toronto and research finds that people will not travel to use a supervised injection service. These services are being offered in areas where people are already using.

### **How will the nurse supervised injection service at Queen West work?**

Most of the people using the service will be existing clients. Clients will arrive at the program with pre-obtained drugs. They will enter Queen West, an existing 26,000 square foot health centre with a large lobby so no one will have to wait outside. Each person will be assessed to ensure they are eligible for the program. They will be given sterile injecting equipment and instruction on safer injecting practices. A nurse will then supervise their injection in a small 500 square foot area with three booths (see photo) dedicated for this purpose, and intervene in the case of any medical emergencies.

Once the individual has injected their drugs they will be directed to a waiting room, for users of the service only, where they will continue to be observed for any negative drug reactions. They will also receive information and referrals about other health and social supports and services at the agency or elsewhere in the community. Hours of operation will be aligned with need and other programs and services offered at the Health Centre.

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

No. Supervised injection services do not contribute to crime and there is considerable research on this subject. We need to address use and overdose through a number of approaches including prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement. Queen West works closely with Toronto Police and local enforcement is a part of addressing the harms associated with drug use. Nurse supervised injection services are one part of this comprehensive approach.

In Toronto, what is being proposed are very small scale supervised injection services in existing health centres that people are already visiting to pick up clean supplies and access health services. This service would move people out of public spaces and into a supervised health centre.

### **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. This way people can be supervised by a nurse, provided with clean supplies, and offered supports including treatment.

It might not always be apparent, but 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 distributed. Hundreds of people die from overdose each year. Rates of HIV and Hepatitis C infection among people who inject drugs are much higher than 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. This means used needles are found in our parks and other public places. Supervised injection services will help to prevent deaths due to overdose, prevent the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C, offer much needed treatment referrals, help to stop people from injecting in public places, and ensure used needles are disposed of properly.

### **Are there any benefits to these services? Do they help people to stop using drugs?**

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;
- 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.

### **Are there nurse 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, across Europe, Australia, and Canada.

### **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 strategy ([www.tph.to/drugstrategy](http://www.tph.to/drugstrategy)) 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 all of these areas.

### **How and when will this happen?**

There is a long process in front of us before a nurse supervised injection service is opened in Toronto. The City of Toronto has been studying injection drug use, has developed and approved a Toronto Drug Strategy, and on March 14, 2016, the Medical Officer of Health recommended we move forward in applying for a Federal exemption to host small-scale, nurse supervised injection services in Toronto. Dr. McKeown has asked the Board of Health to allow us to move to a consultation phase. If approved, we will host a public meeting on Thursday, April 14, 7pm at the Scadding Court Community Centre and Queen West will host other consultations with the community. There will also be a robust consultation process in other parts of the city where these services are being proposed. The Medical Officer of Health will report back to the Board of Health in July, 2016 and request that a formal application for an exemption be filed with the Federal Government. It is likely that the application would be filed in the Fall of 2016. It would then be up to the Federal Government to review the application and respond, which can take time.

### **Will there be an opportunity for community input?**

Safe injection services are being recommended by the Toronto Medical Officer of Health as a way to prevent deaths in our city. Each local agency has a right to apply to the Federal Government for an exemption to offer these services at their existing health centres.

We want to provide you with as much information as possible and an opportunity to raise any issues or concerns you might have so that we can work to address them. Please attend the meeting on **Thursday April 14, 7pm at the Scadding Court Community Centre (707 Dundas Street West)** or contact us to talk more.

If the Federal Government approves Queen West's application, we will work with them to create a Community Liaison Committee where we can all work together to resolve any concerns that may arise, while continuing to save lives with this vital health service.