

City-wide leaders announce support for supervised injection services in Toronto

TORONTO – Following the release of a report from Toronto's Medical Officer of Health earlier this week, leaders from around the City joined together to release a statement, signed by over 50 city-wide leaders, in support of implementing supervised injection services in the City of Toronto.

Over 50 leaders – including Dr. Howard Ovens, Chief of Emergency Medicine at Mt. Sinai Hospital, former Mayors Barbara Hall, David Crombie, John Sewell, Art Eggleton and David Miller, Norman Inkster, former Commissioner of the RCMP, Paul Beeston, former President of the Toronto Blue Jays, Rev. Colin Johnson, Anglican Archbishop of Toronto, Roy McMurty, former Attorney General and Chief Justice of Ontario, Lorna Marsden, former President of York University, Greg Sorbara, former Minister of Finance - Government of Ontario, Dr. Paul Garfinkel, founding CEO, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Dr. Doris Grinspun, CEO of the Registered Nurses Association of Toronto – have signed the statement, urging that Toronto implement these services to help save lives and improve public safety.

"These are critical services that are needed in our City," said Barbara Hall, former Mayor of Toronto, at the press conference to release the statement. "We have the capacity to act to save the lives of our neighbours and our fellow Torontonians – and we must".

On Monday March 14, Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, released a report recommending next steps in implementing supervised injection services. Three sites – The Works-Toronto Public Health, Queen West-Central Toronto Community Health Centre, and South Riverdale Community Health Centre – are planning to add small-scale supervised injection services to their existing health services. Ultimately, Federal exemptions to the Controlled Substances Act are required, and the agencies will be seeking to submit applications following extensive consultation with their communities.

"The number of individuals dying from drug overdoses in Toronto exceeded 200 in 2013 and is increasing," the statement reads. "Supervised injection services can respond positively to the health and social needs of people who use drugs and save lives; and can also improve public safety by reducing the number of discarded needles and injections occurring in laneways and washrooms."

The Board of Health will vote on the staff recommendations to approve the community consultation process on Monday March 21. The Medical Officer of Health anticipates reporting back to the Board of Health in July with the results of the consultations, and for formal approval to proceed with an exemption application.

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