

News Release

November 8, 2017

Toronto opens permanent supervised injection services

Toronto Public Health (TPH) today officially opens its doors to the city's first permanent supervised injection service. Located inside The Works at 277 Victoria St., this life-saving health service provides a safe and hygienic environment for people to inject pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of qualified staff.

"Drug overdose is a significant public health issue with devastating impacts for many," said Dr. Eileen de Villa, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health. "Today marks an important milestone for our city towards addressing this very serious public health crisis affecting so many in our community."

International research shows that supervised injection services reduce drug overdoses, save lives and limit the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C related to unsafe injection practices. In addition to supervised injection, individuals using these health services will be provided with sterile injection supplies, education on overdose prevention and intervention, health counselling services and referrals to drug treatment, housing, income support and other services. These important health services are part of Toronto's Overdose Action Plan, which was adopted by the Board of Health in March 2017.

"Too many people are dying at alarming rates in our city due to overdose. The most recent local data estimates show the number of opioid deaths in Toronto increased by 33 per cent in one year alone," said Councillor Joe Mihevc (Ward 21 St. Paul's), Chair of the Board of Health. "I look forward to working with other orders of government to open future supervised injection locations in the community."

In response to an increase in overdoses this year, TPH opened an interim supervised injection service at Toronto Public Health at 277 Victoria St. on August 21. This interim site provided immediate services while work was completed to open the permanent service. Since opening, there have been more than 800 visits at the site and staff at the clinic have intervened in 10 overdoses. TPH also increased the number of people trained in recognizing and responding to an overdose, naloxone use and is implementing broader distribution of this life-saving treatment.

In July 2016, Toronto City Council approved applications to operate small-scale supervised injection services at Toronto Public Health - The Works, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre and South Riverdale Community Health Centre, as part of their existing harm reduction services for people who inject drugs. The plan was for these facilities to add small-scale supervised injection services to their existing clinical health services for people who inject drugs, as they are three of the busiest needle

distribution programs, accounting for almost 75 per cent of all needles distributed in Toronto in 2015.

"Overdose is a growing crisis in our city. Every week more Torontonians are dying and the painful fact is these deaths are preventable. And the crisis continues to grow," said Councillor Joe Cressy (Ward 20 Trinity-Spadina), Chair of the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel. "This is a critical step in combatting the overdose crisis facing our communities."

More information about Toronto's harm reduction programs and services is available at <http://bit.ly/2fUPBmA>.

Toronto is Canada's largest city, the fourth largest in North America, and home to a diverse population of about 2.8 million people. It is a global centre for business, finance, arts and culture and is consistently ranked one of the world's most livable cities. In 2017, Toronto is honouring Canada's 150th birthday with "TO Canada with Love," a year-long program of celebrations, commemorations and exhibitions. For information on non-emergency City services and programs, Toronto residents, businesses and visitors can visit <http://www.toronto.ca>, call 311, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or follow us on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/TorontoComms> and on Instagram at <http://www.instagram.com/cityofto>.

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