



SCATEH Position Paper on Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS) and Homelessness

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The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness recognizes Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS) as critical, evidence-based services, especially for marginalized populations including those experiencing homelessness.

Background

It is well documented that supervised consumption sites reduce overdose deaths - to date, there have been zero overdose deaths in an SCS worldwide. (Drug Policy Alliance, 2020) Meanwhile, more than 20,000 Canadians have died as a result of drug overdoses since 2016.

Not only do SCSs reduce overdose deaths, they also improve access to care, including addiction treatment for those who are ready. They serve as low-barrier entry points to healthcare for marginalized populations who are often dismissed from mainstream healthcare settings, and the provision of sterilized equipment reduces the spread of blood-borne infections like HIV and hepatitis C.

While public perception persists that SCSs may increase substance use and local crime and discourage individuals from seeking addiction treatment, these concerns are not supported by existing evidence. (Magwood, 2020)

SCSs and Homelessness

SCSs also reduce the number of people injecting drugs in public spaces and needles discarded in the community, when they are located in the area where public drug use is occurring. These benefits can be largely attributed to the fact that SCSs, while open to all, are especially useful for our neighbours who are unhoused and are forced to live their lives on display in public spaces.

Sometimes problematic substance use is a contributing factor in an individual becoming homeless, and sometimes those experiencing homelessness turn to drugs as a survival or coping mechanism. (Feng, 2013) Either way, high-risk substance use poses disproportionate levels of harm to those experiencing homelessness, making harm reduction approaches like SCSs particularly necessary for homeless populations. (Magwood, 2020)

The Need in Barrie

As noted by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU), Barrie ranks third among large municipalities in Ontario for opioid overdose emergency department (ED) visit rates, behind only St. Catharines and Oshawa. The central north area of Barrie (which includes downtown) had 8 times the rate of opioid overdose ED visits in 2019 than the provincial average, and three times

the overall Barrie average. This included fifty overdose ED visits by those identifying as homeless. (SMDHU, 2020)

As an alliance to end homelessness, we advocate for everyone to have safe, affordable, stable housing and to be included in society. In the meantime, we also advocate for policy that protects those marginalized by homelessness from increased health risks, criminalization, and discrimination. For these reasons, SCATEH is in full support of a Supervised Consumption Site in downtown Barrie, where health data and research indicate it will be most useful, and accessible to those who need it most.

References

Drug Policy Alliance. (2020). <https://drugpolicy.org/issues/supervised-consumption-services>

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Magwood O, Salvalaggio G, Beder M, Kendall C, Kpade V, Daghmach W, et al. (2020). The effectiveness of substance use interventions for homeless and vulnerably housed persons: A systematic review of systematic reviews on supervised consumption facilities, managed alcohol programs, and pharmacological agents for opioid use disorder. *PLoS ONE 15*(1): e0227298. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0227298>

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. (2020).

<https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/Drugs/opioids/Supervised-consumption-sites>