

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health / CEO
DATE: 2018 July 19

TEMPORARY OVERDOSE PREVENTION SITE EXTENSION

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

- 1) Receive Report No. 049-18 re: “Temporary Overdose Prevention Site Extension” for information;*
- 2) Request that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) extend approval of the Temporary Overdose Prevention Site for an additional six-month period;*
- 3) Support an Interim Supervised Consumption Facility with federal exemption approval until the permanent site opens; and*
- 4) Direct the Chair to write to the Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care inviting the Minister for a tour of Ontario’s first Temporary Overdose Prevention Site.*

Key Points

- The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) has approved funding for two fixed SCFs. Health Canada is currently reviewing applications.
- MOHLTC funding and the temporary exemption for TOPS is set to expire on August 15, 2018. To date, the service has received over 4000 client visits (over 1500 unique clients), reversed several overdoses, and referred 91 clients to other services such as addictions treatment, mental health counselling, and housing.
- MLHU and RHAC plan to continue temporarily operating supervised consumption services at the current TOPS location, either with a federal exemption or with a provincial extension.

Background

The Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) and the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) submitted the first application for the Temporary Overdose Prevention Site (TOPS) on January 12, 2018. On January 19, in response to this application, the Ontario government approved one-time funding in the amount of \$130,700 to establish Ontario’s first sanctioned TOPS. The TOPS site opened on February 12, 2018, and funding is approved until August 15, 2018.

The TOPS has provided necessary health services to clients in a manner that is both accessible and free from stigma. This has helped reduce the number of overdose deaths and infectious diseases impacting some of Ontario’s most vulnerable and marginalized populations. There have been 4,791 supervised injections at the TOPS between February 12 and June 30, 2018. The site averages 55 visits per weekday and 30 visits per day on weekends, with a peak of 78 client visits in one day. Hydromorphone has been the most common drug reported to have been used at TOPS, followed by crystal methamphetamine, “unspecified opioid,” “other,” fentanyl, and heroin. There have been six overdoses during this time, of which five were treated with oxygen alone, while one client required administration of naloxone. There have been no overdose deaths in or around the site.

The aftercare room is where in-kind community organizations provide client support and links to services. This model has been effective in providing referrals to these services. This has included: 31 referrals to Addiction Services Thames Valley; 4 for methadone treatment; 20 to the London CAREs Housing Team; 10 to the Centre of Hope (Housing Stability or Shelter); 2 to the Unity Project shelter; 10 to the London InterCommunity Health Centre; 4 to the Hepatitis C Team; 3 to the MLHU Sexual Health Clinic; 3 to the RHAC HIV Team; and 7 for care in hospitals.

On April 20, 2018, applications were submitted to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) and Health Canada for an exemption under the Controlled Drug and Substances Act (CDSA) to permit the operation of two fixed Supervised Consumption Facilities (SCFs) and one mobile site. The MOHLTC has approved the two fixed SCF applications and has provided funding for capital and operational costs ([Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#)). The MLHU and RHAC are currently awaiting Health Canada's approval as they review the fixed-site applications.

Plan for Extending TOPS

While awaiting federal approval for the permanent SCF sites, there is a pressing need to ensure the continuity of service provided by the temporary site. Staff have sought an extension for the operation of TOPS from the provincial government, but due to the interruption of government activity by the election, to date there has been no indication as to whether the extension will be granted. As an alternative, a request has been made to Health Canada to allow the existing TOPS location to serve as an interim site for one of the permanent Supervised Consumption Facilities while the permanent site is being prepared. Health Canada has replied that they will consider this request.

Invitation

The Temporary Overdose Prevention Site in downtown London is not only the first in Ontario, but it is also a model of service integration based on a public consultation process that has been described as a best practice. As an example of what can be achieved in harm reduction with effective leadership, careful collaboration, responsiveness to client feedback, and strong community input, it is an ideal facility for Ontario's new Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to tour in order to better understand what this sort of service can be.

Next Steps

The City of London recently amended the Official Plan, the London Plan, and the City of London Zoning By-law to include a definition of "Supervised Consumption Facility" and establish location guidelines for these uses. According to Official Plan Amendment No. 680, "Supervised consumption facilities ... may be permitted within any land use designation subject to a zoning by-law amendment and all of the policies of this Plan." An appeal of the amendments has been filed, and will likely be heard by the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT). Pending the outcome of the appeal, an application for zoning by-law amendment for both sites was submitted to the City by the MLHU and RHAC on June 15, 2018, for consideration, and both parties are engaged in the City's pre-planning process. The applications for zoning of the permanent sites will proceed to City Council for consideration once the appeal to the Official Plan amendments is resolved.

Given that the injection drug crisis continues to pose a serious risk to marginalized populations, and considering the upcoming expiry of funding and temporary exemption for the Temporary Overdose Prevention Site, it is therefore recommended that the Board of Health urge the MOHLTC to allow TOPS to continue to operate for an additional six-month period and support the operation of an interim SCF until the permanent sites can be opened.

This report submitted by the Sexual Health Team, Environmental Health and Infectious Disease Division.



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