

WHAI Statement re: Closing of Safe Consumption Sites – August 22, 2024

In response to the devastating announcement on August 19th by Premier Doug Ford and Minister of Health, Sylvia Jones, regarding the closure of several safe consumption sites, WHAI expresses solidarity with those who will be impacted by these closures, including the communities who have been advocating to open a site and now face even harsher barriers to their goal.

Safe consumption sites provide space for people to use substances more safely and prevent deaths due to overdose. Access to sterile injecting equipment also reduces the rate of HIV and Hepatitis C infections, illustrating the great need for safe consumption sites in our communities. The decision to close these invaluable sites is not based on evidence, but rather is rooted in misinformation fueled by ignorance and stigma. Public policy should be evidence-based as informed by healthcare professionals, harm reduction workers, community advocates, and the expertise of community members most impacted by the ongoing toxic drug crisis. WHAI is particularly concerned about how these proposed cuts and closures will affect cis and Trans women, 2-Spirit and Non-Binary people in Ontario who depend on the comprehensive and life-saving services offered through the low-barrier access of safe consumption sites.

In a national survey report: *Holding and Untangling - Women and Gender Inclusive Overdose Prevention* conducted by the Dr. Peter Centre, 74.3% of respondents reported feeling comfortable accessing safer consumption sites¹. Many safe consumption sites were found to also be inclusive to other marginalized communities, such as sex workers, queer and racialized community members. As such, the closing of safe consumption sites would also mean further isolating marginalized communities.

WHAI works to address the inequalities disproportionately faced by our priority populations who are put at higher systemic risk of HIV than others, including ACB women, who studies have shown are less likely to be administered naloxone or be treated in a hospital setting following opioid-related toxicity². Safe consumption sites are an invaluable aspect of harm reduction and critical to WHAI work. In the *Collective Action Community Change* report, 42% of those who participated in WHAI's community consultations identified as women who use drugs or substances³. As a result, WHAI chose Harm Reduction as one of our Priority Areas for Collaboration based on the influx of coordinators who identified it as a major area of need in their communities.

Rather than closing essential healthcare services, the province should ensure that funding and support for safe consumption sites and harm reduction services are increased and available in all communities across the province. WHAI will continue to show up and support the organization of events, protests, and other advocacy efforts to raise awareness of the importance of safe consumption sites and challenging the proposed changes to public policy.

¹ Kaminski N, Carl E, Swann S, Smith C, Smoke A, Gyan-Mante A, D'Alessio H, Mizon L, Rex A, Rudzinski K, and Ranger C. *Holding and Untangling - A Lived Experience Lens: Women & Gender Expansive Populations' Access to Supervised Consumption/Overdose Prevention Sites*. Report prepared in collaboration with the Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs (CAPUD) and the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation.

² Campbell TJ, Kitchen SA, Tadrous M, et al. Varying circumstances surrounding opioid toxicity deaths across ethnoracial groups in Ontario, Canada: a population-based descriptive cross-sectional study. *BMJ Public Health* 2024;2:e000480. doi:10.1136/bmjph-2023-000480

³ Women and HIV/AIDS Initiative. (2024). *Collective Action Community Change: A Report Amplifying Community Voices*. [Collective Action Community Change: A Report Amplifying Community Voices - WHAI Toronto](#)