

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA HIGHLIGHTS SUPPORT FOR SAFER DRUG SUPPLY PROJECTS IN ONTARIO

The opioid overdose crisis continues to be one of the most serious public health crises in Canada's recent history. Tragically, in many communities, the COVID-19 outbreak is worsening this crisis. The Government of Canada is taking action to ensure communities have the tools and support they need to keep people at risk of overdose safe during the outbreak.

Today, the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health, highlighted federal funding support of nearly \$9.5 million for four safer supply projects for people at risk of overdose in Ontario. These projects will provide pharmaceutical-grade medication as an alternative to the toxic illegal supply in circulation.

The four Ontario safer supply projects will provide people who have not responded to other forms of treatment for opioid use disorder with a safer medical alternative from a licensed prescriber. The initiatives will also connect them with important health and social services, including treatment, which may be more difficult to access during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Similarly, to help communities respond to increasing opioid overdose deaths and harms, Health Canada approved three short-term Urgent Public Health Need Sites. Also known as overdose prevention sites, two are currently operating in Ottawa and Toronto emergency COVID-19 response shelters, and one is operating in Kingston. These sites offer supervised consumption, harm reduction services, education and 24/7 on-call services for shelter residents. In addition, all provinces and territories have been authorized by Health Canada to establish Urgent Public Health Need Sites until September 30, 2021.

Substance use disorder is a health condition that can be managed and treated if people are provided with services and supports that best meet their needs. During the COVID-19 outbreak, people who use drugs are experiencing a number of increased risks, with several jurisdictions reporting higher rates of overdose, including fatal overdoses and other harms related to an increasingly toxic illegal supply. The Government of Canada is working in collaboration with all levels of government, partners,

stakeholders, people with lived and living experience of drug use, and organizations in communities across the country to respond to the outbreak and the overdose crisis.

"It is devastating to see that the COVID-19 outbreak has worsened the situation for Canadians struggling with substance use disorders, including those living in Ontario. Each life lost is someone's family member, friend or co-worker. The life-saving initiatives announced today are part of the Government's efforts to help people at risk of overdose in Ontario stay safe during the outbreak and find access to care and treatment for substance use disorder."

The Honourable Patty Hajdu Minister of Health

"In response to the ongoing toxic illegal drug supply, Safer Supply Ottawa Partners (Pathways to Recovery, Recovery Care, Ottawa Inner City Health, Respect RX Pharmacy, Somerset West Community Health Centre, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, and Ottawa Public Health) continue to work to expand access to safer supply programming in the community. Expanding current services, safer supply initiatives seek to decrease the risk of accidental overdose and improve health by providing access to prescribed pharmaceutical opioids and further connect people who use drugs to integrated, wrap-around health, social and treatment services." Donna Sarrazin Project Manager, Safer Supply Ottawa

"The approval of an Urgent Public Health Need Site at the Routhier Community Centre has been an essential component of our COVID-19 strategy. It is more difficult for people living in a shelter to adhere to public health directives like physical distancing, isolation, and quarantine because they have nowhere else to go. The Routhier space has provided the ability to adhere to those directives in a way that allows clients who are waiting for test results, self-isolating, or in quarantine a safe place to stay and while accessing the services they need."

Wendy Muckle Chief Executive Officer, Ottawa Inner City Health

"We see safer supply as a necessary extension of the harm reduction work our Centre has been doing for decades. This support from the Federal gov-

ernment is the result of unrelenting advocacy by people who use drugs and harm reduction advocates and the political will of a government who is striving to listen to those most at the margins." Angela Robertson

Executive Director, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre

"The expansion of the Safer Opioid Supply Program focuses on a client-centered and team-based approach within a community health centre model. In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the need for a safer supply in our community has grown larger as marginalized individuals are struggling even more now. This approach is saving lives and improving the overall health and well-being for people at high risk of imminent death from overdose in our community." Scott Courtyce Executive Director, London InterCommunity Health Centre

"The risks of overdose death created by a toxic and unstable illegal drug supply have been exacerbated in recent months by the COVID-19 outbreak and the structural inequality and discrimination faced by communities based on racism, colonization, poverty and homelessness. Programs like the Downtown East Collaborative Safer Opioid Supply project along with supervised consumption and overdose prevention services are essential and life-saving. They also support conditions for people who access them that reflect the need for a greater shift in drug policy, legislative reform, health equity and social justice."

Jason Altenberg CEO, South Riverdale Community Health Centre

"The opening of the new site has significantly increased access to supervised consumption and health and social services for people in Kingston. Statistics demonstrate a 200% increase in visits (week-over-week). The new model is more client-centred and allows for enhanced relationship-building and connectedness with our clients. We are also better able to educate and inform people about the toxic drug supply, helping to save lives."

Mike Bell CEO, Kingston Community Health Centres

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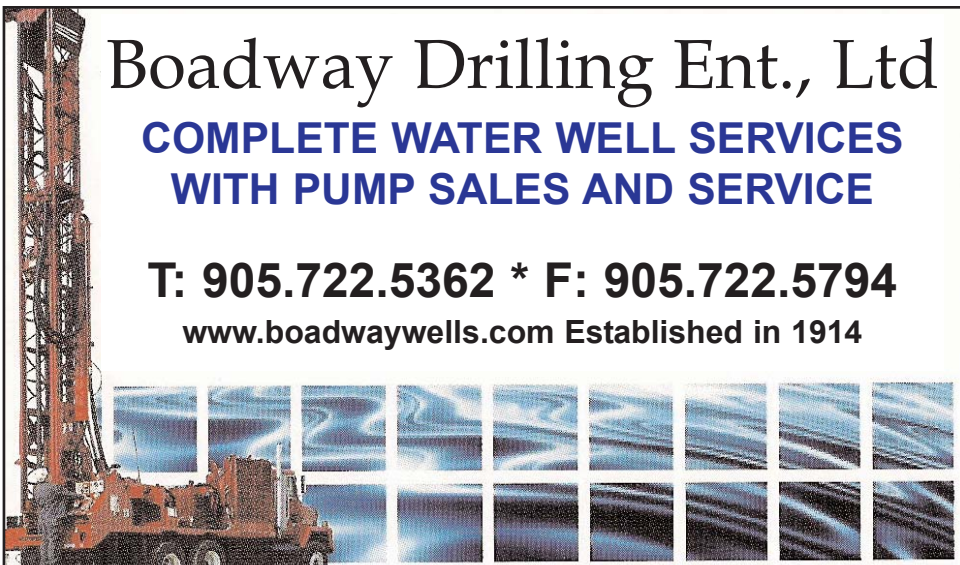


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