Despite a growing number of studies indicating that supervised injection sites (also referred to as safe injection sites) help reduce drug overdose among addicts and the spread of diseases due to dirty needles, there are only two such facilities in Canada.

The Conservative government was not supportive of safe injection sites and had introduced the Respect for Communities Act which required such facilities to meet stringent requirements including consultations with community members, public health officials and local police, as well as providing information on local crime rates and public nuisance incidents.

In March, 2016 Health Canada granted Vancouver’s Insite safe injection facility a four-year exemption to operate. This was the first time since 2008 that the 13-year-old facility received an exemption that was longer than a year.

Almost at the same time, municipal and health officials in Toronto banded with community leaders in calling for safe injection sites for the city.

A 2006 STUDY THAT TRACKED CRIMES NEAR THE INSITE FACILITY A YEAR BEFORE AND A YEAR AFTER THE SITE WAS OPENED, FOUND THERE WAS NO MARKED INCREASE OR DECREASE IN THE OCCURRENCE OF DRUG TRAFFICKING, ASSAULT AND ROBBERY THE AREA.

A STUDY OF THE INSITE FACILITY USING MATHEMATICAL MODELING ESTIMATES THAT THE SITE COULD AVERT TWO TO 12 DEATHS FROM DRUG OVERDOSE, PER YEAR.

SAFE INJECTION SITES BY THE NUMBERS:

1980 – The first supervised injection site was established in Switzerland

90 – The estimated number of supervised injection sites in the world (most are in European countries including Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Norway, Luxemburg and Denmark)

2 – The number of supervised injection sites in Canada (Dr. Peter Centre opened in 2002 and Insite in 2003. Both are in Vancouver)

IN 2012, THE INSITE CLINIC SAW:

• AN AVERAGE OF 1,028 VISITS PER DAY
• 193,764 VISITS TO THE INJECTION ROOM
• AN AVERAGE OF 529 INJECTION ROOM VISITS PER DAY
• 497 OVERDOSE INCIDENTS
• 3,418 CLINICAL TREATMENT INTERVENTIONS
• 27 PER CENT OF PARTICIPANTS WERE WOMEN
• 17 PER CENT OF PARTICIPANTS WERE ABORIGINAL
• PRINCIPLE SUBSTANCES REPORTED WERE HEROIN (51 PER CENT OF INSTANCES), COCAINE (22 PER CENT OF INSTANCES) AND METHAMPHETAMINE (10 PER CENT)
• 4,564 REFERRALS TO OTHER SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
• 488 DISCHARGES FROM ONSITE DETOX

Source: http://supervisedinjection.vch.ca/research/supporting-research/

ARE SUPERVISED INJECTION SITES COST EFFECTIVE?

$ 4.1 million – the cost of operating one injection site for a year, according to a St. Michael’s Hospital study published in the Addiction Journal.

The same study said the site will be able to save the public health system money because it would cost $10,763 less per patient, per year than the typical medical interventions used to treat addiction. (Source: Potential cost-effectiveness of supervised injection facilities in Toronto and Ottawa, Canada – Nov. 30, 2015 by Eva A. Evans, Gregory S. Zarkin, Carol J. Strike, Jennifer A. Jairam, Gillian Kolla, and Ahmed M. Bayoumi)

$60,000 – The cost of medication in Canada for hepatitis C, a virus which could be spread by sharing a needle. (Source: Ottawa Citizen, June 30, 2015)

$18 million estimated net savings the Vancouver Insite facility can provide the healthcare system when you take into consideration hepatitis C and HIV transmission through needle sharing and the cost of treating these diseases. (Source: The cost-effectiveness of Vancouver’s supervised injection facility – CMAJ, Nov. 18, 2010 by Ahmed M. Bayoumi and Gregory S. Zarkin)

CAN SAFE INJECTION SITES SAVE LIVES?

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