

Exploring the need for and feasibility of implementing a Supervised Consumption Services site in the City of Timmins:



Artwork: Mique, Michelle; Grondin, Beau. International Overdose Awareness Day Mural. 2019. Timmins, Ontario.

Highlights from the surveys conducted January 2022 to August 2022

The surveys were completed in a research project led by Northern Ontario School of Medicine family medicine residents, in partnership with the Timmins and Area Drug Strategy. This report summarizing the results was produced by the Porcupine Health Unit.



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The Timmins and Area Drug Strategy (TADS) Steering Committee conducted community surveys in partnership with a research project led by Northern Ontario School of Medicine family medicine residents to determine the need for and the feasibility of implementing a Supervised Consumption Services (SCS) site in Timmins.

Supervised Consumption Services sites are also known as overdose prevention sites, or safe injection sites. They require Health Canada approval and are monitored spaces where people can use their own pre-obtained substances (drugs are not provided onsite) with sterile supplies under medical supervision to prevent overdose deaths. The sites also provide access to treatment, healthcare, mental health, and social services and provide education, naloxone, and wound care.

Surveys were completed by three groups at different time periods, between January 2022 to August 2022:

1. People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) (107 consenting respondents) – facilitated survey,
2. The community (529 consenting respondents) – on-line survey, and
3. TADS Steering Committee Agencies – on-line survey, (17 consenting respondents).

Highlights of the results:

1. There is support in the City of Timmins for a Supervised Consumption Services site (SCS).

- The majority of respondents believe a SCS site would be helpful in the City of Timmins:
 - The majority (58.8%) of community survey respondents believe that a SCS would be helpful in Timmins.
 - The majority of People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) survey respondents (74.2%) had heard of SCS, and the majority of those individuals (81.7%) would consider using these services.
- Downtown in the City of Timmins is the preferred location.
 - Downtown was the top location selected by community survey respondents (42.5%).

Survey Highlights

- Timmins Central (Ward 5) was the first-choice neighbourhood for a SCS site by 75.0% of PWID respondents. Most (65.6%) report that Timmins Central (Ward 5) was the neighbourhood they injected in most often.
- The top location identified by TADS respondents was centrally located (Downtown Timmins) and respondents identified that Timmins only needs one site.
- The majority of PWID respondents (65.6%) who report experiencing an overdose, report Timmins Central (Ward 5) as the location of their last overdose.

2. A Supervised Consumption Services site in the City of Timmins would address some of the current needs of the community.

Overall, a SCS site would benefit the community.

- Community survey respondents believe that a SCS site would help (top 3 responses):
 - Decrease the number of syringes on the street,
 - Decrease public drug use, and
 - Decrease the risk of injury and death from drug overdose.
- Many TADS respondents believe a SCS will help:
 - Individuals gain access to different types of treatments and services,
 - Increase Hospital Emergency Departments, and first responders' capacity, and
 - Reduce public drug use, supplies left in public spaces, and increase safety for the community.
- The 3 most likely community impacts that PWID respondents report a SCS site will have in the City of Timmins are:
 - Reduce overdoses,
 - Reduce the number of syringes on the street, and
 - People would learn about drug treatment.

A SCS site would address the high rates of overdose.

- The City of Timmins is experiencing a higher rate of opioid related deaths than Ontario and most other areas in the province.
 - The rate of opioid-related deaths in the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) area almost tripled between 2018 and 2020 (from 16.4 per 100,000 in 2018 to 46.9 per 100,000 in 2020)¹. In 2020, the PHU area had the second-highest opioid-related death rate in Ontario². In 2021, the cases and rate remained at similar levels¹.
 - Most of these deaths occurred in Timmins². The rate of opioid-related deaths in the Timmins area increased more than three-fold between 2018 and 2020, from 23.4 to 75.3 per 100,000². Unfortunately, Timmins continues to have one of the highest opioid-related death rates in the province, compared to other medium population centres².
- PWID report that accidental overdose is occurring.
 - The majority (73.2%) of PWID respondents reported they had (ever) overdosed by accident.
 - The majority (70.2%) of PWID survey respondents report witnessing an overdose in the last 6 months.

A SCS site would reduce community harms associated with substance use.

- Public drug use is a current community concern.
 - Most PWID respondents (78.3%) report injecting in public or semi-public in the last 6 months.
- Factors that increase infections and diseases (that are costly to treat / manage) are occurring.
 - Reusing needles can contribute to increased risk for bacterial infections, including endocarditis (life threatening infection of the heart). Most PWID surveyed (54.1%) have reused needles for more than one injection. Sharing supplies puts people at risk for transmitting /contracting Hepatitis C and/or HIV. 20.9% of PWID survey respondents reported using needles that someone else had/was using.

¹ Office of the Chief Coroner, April 14, 2023.

² Office of the Chief Coroner - Data effective April 18, 2022.

- Factors that increase the risk of overdose deaths are occurring.
 - The majority (76.0%) of PWID respondents report that they have injected (used) alone (this is a major risk factor of dying of an overdose).
 - Less than half of PWID respondents (46.3%) who report experiencing an overdose, report that an ambulance was called.

A SCS site would support the health and wellbeing of those who use substances, including access to treatment.

- There is a need for other services to be available at a SCS site.
 - Community survey respondents want to see a multi-solution approach to addictions including housing services, treatment services, and mental health services.
 - TADS respondents report that the SCS site needs to be more than just a place to use drugs. Treatment and detox options, education, and health services need to be available to all people who use the site.
 - An SCS site can support access to treatment services. The majority of PWID survey respondents (56.1%) report ever being in a drug treatment or detox program, with 25.0% report trying to get into treatment programs in the last 6 months, but unable to.
- Community survey respondents believe the services that should be available at a SCS site are:
 - Social workers,
 - Mental health counsellors,
 - Indigenous support workers, and
 - Nurses (health services – vaccinations, wound care, etc.).
- PWID survey respondents believe the most important services for a SCS site are:
 - Preventing / responding to overdoses,
 - Supply distribution (sterile equipment), and
 - Access to health services.

3. Although a Supervised Consumption Services site is supported in the City of Timmins, there are some concerns that need to be addressed.

- While the majority of community survey respondents believe a SCS would be helpful in Timmins, some (31.7%) do not support a SCS at all, and others (8.8%) are unsure about a SCS.
- Community survey respondents report the top concerns of having an SCS site are:
 - Decreased property values,
 - Increased use of drugs, and
 - Drug selling / trafficking near the site.
- Community survey respondents suggest the following strategies to address the concerns:
 - Evaluate the use and impact of the SCS site and share results with the community,
 - Increase lighting around the site and surrounding area, and
 - Increase police presence in the SCS area.
- TADS respondents report the top concerns of having an SCS site are:
 - Stigma towards PWID who may use the site,
 - Community pushback, and
 - Funding and government support.
- TADS respondents suggest the following strategies to address the concerns:
 - Ongoing community education, and
 - Securing government support and funding.