

SOS

PARKDALE QUEEN WEST COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

SAFER OPIOIOD SUPPLY



PARKDALE
QUEEN WEST
Community
Health Centre

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Safer Opioid Supply (SOS) Program at Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre! Alongside similar programs in Canada, the PQWCHC SOS Program launched after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The SOS Program is a response to the urgent demand of people who use drugs for a safe alternative to the toxic drug supply.

GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

The SOS Program provides people who use opioids with prescriptions for regulated pharmaceutical options. We also connect people with primary care (family doctors, nurse practitioners, and nurses) and social care (case management, health navigation, and counselling).

- We are based in harm reduction practices and principles
- The goals include supporting people to decrease or eliminate their use of illicit opioids in order to save lives, decrease overdoses, and build stability – but also assisting people to pursue their own goals
- The SOS Program aims to reduce the challenges participants face to get their supply
- Safer supply helps people avoid the brutal effects of withdrawal, allows people to have more say in their health care, and ultimately supports people to lead self-determined lives



Safer supply aims to not just lessen the harms associated with opioid use, but to also move program members from surviving to thriving by helping them find their voice and be their best self. Safer supply doesn't just stop at prescribing. It keeps goals moving, with the program member leading the way. When basic healthcare needs are met, members are able to move into other aspects of their health and wellness.

- Bee Sims, program member

LEARN MORE

This handbook is for those who are currently enrolled in the SOS Program and their families or support networks. It will help answer some of your SOS-related questions and provide a summary of the program model and what to expect as a program member.



HOW IT WORKS

Intake

If you are considering safer supply, or you know someone who would benefit, go to our webpage on the PQWCHC site:

<https://pqwchc.org/programs-services/harm-reduction/safer-opioid-supply-sos-program>

The webpage has the most up-to-date information about whether the SOS Program is open for referrals. You can fill out a form on the site with an email address you or someone you trust can be reached at. Our team will send you an email when we are accepting referrals, including self-referrals.

The email will have clear instructions for you or the trusted person for submitting a referral in person at the Health Centre or online. If you hear about referrals being open a different way, you can ask for more information at the Welcome Desk at either main location of the Health Centre.

We understand that there is a great need for safer supply, and due to our capacity limits, our program is often closed. You can stay connected with harm reduction-related programs at Parkdale Queen West CHC by visiting our sites.



Team

Our multidisciplinary team offers a variety of services related to health care and wellbeing!

- **Prescribers:** Your nurse practitioner or doctor assesses your tolerance, adjusts your medications to find a dose that works for you, and provides primary care services if you don't already have a family doctor or NP.
- **Registered Nurses:** Your RN provides follow-up and ongoing care, conducts bloodwork and urine screening, connects with pharmacies regarding prescriptions, schedules clinic appointments, supports with wound care, and provides other client-centered health care. In addition, nurses work with some program members who access our Observed Arm service, which offers spotting/witnessed dosing plus health care. This part of the SOS Program is dedicated to those who require extra supports, particularly around medication use. Depending on your care plan, you may be required to have your doses observed. Your Observed Arm nurse is there to ensure that you can receive your medications in the safest way even if you have a risk of medical issues.

- **Case Managers:** SOS case managers ensure that all the factors in your life that impact your health and wellbeing are considered, and they can meet with you when you need and/or around your other appointments. Case managers will support with any referrals or advocacy necessary. This may include working with you on:
 - Income security and income tax support
 - Food security
 - Legal issues
 - Identification
 - Housing
 - Education
 - Employment
- **Health Navigators:** Safer supply health navigators provide community-based social supports. These include accompaniment to appointments and help with community integration, harm reduction supplies and education, and supports related to housing and employment. Health Navigators generally have a peer support background and can meet program participants where they are at; their role primarily involves allyship and advocacy. Health Navigators encourage autonomy and self-determination and can help you with goal setting and connecting you with others on the team.
- **Counsellors:** Program members will have access to our drop-in and appointment-based counselling services, including over the phone. SOS counsellors provide a confidential space for you to express yourself and your needs and concerns. You can decide what to work on and set a pace that is comfortable for you. Counsellors can also provide direct referrals to specialized counselling if requested (such as to anger management or domestic/partner violence supports).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What Medications Will Be Offered to Me?

- Medications typically offered on safer supply are Kadian and Dilaudid (hydromorphone). Kadian is a long-acting version of morphine, and it is taken orally. The purpose of this is to help people avoid getting dopesick. Dilaudid is a short-acting opioid prescribed to program members. People use it to get high, support with withdrawal symptoms, curb cravings, and/or manage pain.
- Some program participants choose to take methadone or suboxone with their Dilaudid instead of Kadian.
- Keep in mind that you will always have the option to discuss medication usage, dosage, and even alternative options with your prescriber.



How Often Will I Meet with My Prescriber?

- When you are a new program member, you will meet with your prescriber frequently, even multiple times a week if needed to get you to a comfortable dose quickly. Appointments are to reassess your medication dosage, and to meet any other health concerns you may have.
- As a program member, you will be expected to have an in-person appointment with a provider at least once a month. Follow-up appointments may be with your SOS Nurse Practitioner, doctor, or with the SOS nurse.
- Phone appointments are available to you as well, but it's important to note that your prescriber does need to see you in person periodically to get a sense of how you are doing.
- Follow-up appointments are important for ensuring your safety, but we understand sometimes it's difficult to make it to an appointment. After you miss two or more appointments in a row, your prescription may be decreased until we're able to see you again. Without assessing you, we can't be sure it is safe to continue your current safer supply dose.

How Will My Medication Be Dispensed?

- Medications will be dispensed to you daily at your local pharmacy, meaning you will need to visit the pharmacy at least once a day (unless you are in the Observed Arm, which means that you will receive your doses at the Health Centre).
- We understand that this is a commitment and might require an adjustment period. If picking up medication daily is something you need support with, feel free to discuss this with your prescriber or other team member.

What If I Miss A Few Doses at My Pharmacy?

- It is important to note that missing two or more days of your daily dispensed medications will result in a hold being put on your script. You will likely have to be re-assessed by your prescriber since your tolerance may have changed.
- Your pharmacist can support you with this by contacting your prescriber to notify them that you came for your script, and you may be reassessed over the phone to continue your script.
- If you have any concerns related to your script, you can also contact your Health Navigator or Case Manager for support or call medical reception directly to get in touch with your prescriber: Parkdale Site 416-537-2455; Queen West (Bathurst) Site 416-703-8480.
- If you know you will miss a dose and are able to call ahead and let your prescriber know, this will help to ensure that there are no interruptions.

What If I Am Hospitalized or Incarcerated?

- If ever you are in this situation, ask the hospital or intake staff to contact your health care provider. They can reach your prescriber directly at the Health Centre, and medical reception can support with transferring messages. Support staff can also call your pharmacy directly to notify them that your script needs to be transferred or adjusted, and pharmacy staff can then connect with your prescriber.
- Hospital visits and run-ins with police are overwhelming. You can always share your Case Manager or Health Navigator's information with institutional staff. That way, your care team can advocate on your behalf and answer any questions you might feel uncomfortable asking, as long as we have appropriate consent.

- The SOS team will make every effort to advocate for your prescriptions to be continued if you are hospitalized or incarcerated.

Do I Have to Do Urine Screens?

- As a program member, you will be asked to provide urine for screening about once per month. Urine tests are used to ensure you are taking your medications, and to provide you information on what drugs might be in your supply and how they could interact with your medications.
- The presence of fentanyl or other drugs in your urine are **never** used as a reason to stop your safer supply. We don't require that you stop using other drugs to receive your script.
- We understand providing urine samples can be a negative experience for some participants. We will never require that you be watched while you urinate. Prescribers and nurses try to make sure that these urine screens are performed with respect and some flexibility, as well.
- Some program members like to initiate their urine screen when they arrive so that they can relax and focus on the appointment.



HOW TO GET INVOLVED

As an SOS program member, you will have opportunities to share your expertise, engage in skill-building activities, and connect with other program members.

SOS Advisory Groups

The advisory groups, made up of program members with the support of staff, are an integral part of the program and how we make changes. Important program decisions are discussed by the advisory groups so that the SOS Program makes changes led by the needs, priorities, and experiences of members. The advisories are a crucial way that the SOS Program can enact the value of client-centred care and the principle of “nothing about us without us.” The groups generally meet monthly.

- **SOS Indigenous Advisory Council:** This advisory group is specific to Indigenous participants, and an Indigenous Elder will also be sharing space with program members.
- **SOS General Advisory Committee:** This advisory committee is open to any SOS Program member. The committee is a closed group, so you will need to meet with a facilitator about your interest before joining.

If you would like to get more involved with SOS-related programming, volunteer opportunities, paid surveys and research, or honorarium-based work, connect with your SOS Case Manager or Health Navigator.

RESOURCES

Harm Reduction Rooms

There are harm reduction rooms at both sites which serve program members and the greater community. The room is a confidential space for you to discuss sexual health, provide or receive harm reduction education, pick up supplies, and drop off used harm reduction material. Through our harm reduction rooms, community members have access to:

- Safer injection kits
- Crack kits
- Other safer drug use equipment (e.g., cookers, water, ties, vitamin C, and sharps containers)
- Smoking foils
- Crystal meth pipes
- Foil chasing the dragon smoking kits
- Naloxone kits
- Safer body piercing kits
- Testosterone/steroid kits
- Safer sex supplies (lube, condoms, dental dams)
- Safe disposal of used harm reduction equipment

Peer Satellite Workers

Peer support satellite volunteers at PQWCHC offer support after hours, including access to sterile drug supplies, naloxone and overdose response training, safe needle disposal, peer witnessing and referrals to health care services. Satellite workers are people with lived experience of substance use. They usually work out of their homes and can also meet people in community. If you are interested in learning more, ask a member of the SOS Team to put you in touch with the Satellite Site Coordinator.

Drug Checking Services at PQWCHC

At Parkdale Queen West CHC, we acknowledge the risk that's involved when using street supply. That is why we have partnered with Toronto's Drug Checking Services, which is a free and anonymous service offered to community and program members. You can drop off samples at either of our sites, where they will be taken to a lab to be tested. After 2-3 business days, your results should be ready to pick up!

Supervised Consumption Sites: Safer Use

Your safety matters! Parkdale Queen West CHC has supervised consumption sites (SCSs) at both locations. This free and anonymous service is open to anyone who wants a space to use instead of using alone. This welcoming and supportive environment is available to you, no referral or appointment necessary.

Queen West SCS Hours*:

- Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 9am-8pm
- Wednesday: 1-8pm
- Friday: 9:30am-4:30pm
- Saturday and Sunday: 10am-6pm

Parkdale SCS Hours*:

- Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 9am-7:30pm
- Wednesday: 1-7:30pm
- Friday: 9am-4:30pm
- Saturday and Sunday: 10am-5:30pm

*Hours may change. Please visit either site to see the most updated hours posted!

Niiwin Wendaanimak (Four Winds): Indigenous Health and Wellness Program

The Niiwin Wendaanimak Program is a holistic wellness program centered on harm reduction, culture, and healing for Indigenous-identified community members who may be living with challenges related to substance use, mental health, and homelessness. Niiwin Wendaanimak provides culturally-specific Indigenous supports such as access to healing ceremonies, land-based outings, cultural teachings, health education, and case management supports – in addition to access to primary care, counselling, and harm reduction supports. Indigenous SOS Program members who would like to get involved with Niiwin Wendaanimak's variety of programs can connect with a team member to make an introduction!

CONCLUSION

We hope this handbook has provided you with some helpful information about the SOS Program at PQWCHC. We want to ensure your time in the program is as rewarding and fulfilling as possible while supporting your goals and overall health. If you have any more questions, please ask a team member!

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