



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the Overdoes Prevention Site at Parkdale

Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, 1229 Queen Street West

“Integrated OPS at Parkdale Site will be a life-saving addition to our harm reduction services. We see OPS as a much needed public health response to an individual and public health concern. We look forward to working with the clients and our communities in the implementation of this valuable service.”

- Angela Robertson, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre, Executive Director



What is Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre?

Parkdale Queen West CHC (PQWCHC) is an accredited community-based health and wellness service governed by a Board of Directors and serving the south-west Toronto. We are one of 73 Community Health Centers (CHCs) across Ontario, all of which have inter-professional teams of service providers including physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers/counsellors, health promoters and community workers. PQWCHC was formed in April 2017 through the successful merger of Queen West – Central Toronto CHC and Parkdale CHC, combined we have over 70 years of experience providing care to our communities. Our mission is to provide equitable, accessible urban healthcare for people where, when and how they need it. We offer a broad range of services, including primary health care, dental care, harm reduction, health promotion, counselling, and community development programming. We provide services at three main clinic locations, as well as within the community.

What services are provided at the Parkdale site?

Parkdale offers a broad range of services including medical and dental care, health promotion, counselling and mental health supports, HIV and Hepatitis C supports, treatment and education, anonymous HIV testing, wellness groups, practical supports (ID clinic), harm reduction including needle, stem kit and naloxone distribution, through both fixed site and street outreach and illness prevention, advocacy, and community engagement and development. In addition, we provide referrals to a range of services and supports, such as housing and drug treatment.



What is an overdose prevention service (OPS)?

OPS's are health services that provide a safer and hygienic environment for people to consume (via injection, oral and intranasal consumption methods) pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of staff. In addition to supervised injection/consumption, individuals are provided with sterile injection and other harm reduction supplies, education on safer injection/consumption, overdose prevention and intervention, Naloxone kits, Fentanyl testing strips, medical and counselling services, and referrals to housing, income support, drug treatment services and other supports.

What is the new service being proposed at Parkdale site?

Parkdale site has added a small-scale OPS trailer to its existing harm reduction and health services for people who inject and/or snort (intranasal consumption) drugs and/or pop pills (oral consumption). The service is located in the parking lot adjacent to Parkdale site. The space for the service includes a dedicated wait area that includes intake/reception and assessment/treatment, an injection/consumption space with 3 supervised injection/consumption booths and an adjoining post injection/consumption space (our chill-out area). The service will be staffed by a nurse and harm reduction workers with a coordinator for oversight. Most of the people using the service will be existing clients. Hours of operation will be seven days a week 12:00 noon until 12:00 midnight. Last call is one hour before closing.

Why is an Overdoes Prevention Service needed at Parkdale?

Parkdale has been delivering harm reduction in the community for over 20 years. Parkdale is one of the busiest needle distribution programs in Toronto. In 2017/18, we had over 8,000 client visits and distributed almost 160,000 needles. We distributed approximately 5,500 naloxone kits to clients and community members during the same period.

Between August 3, 2017 and August 2, 2018, Toronto Paramedic Services attended 3,042 non-fatal and 161 fatal suspected opioid overdose calls. This is an average of 58 non-fatal and 3 fatal suspected opioid overdoses per week. South Parkdale, the neighbourhood in which the Parkdale site of Parkdale-Queen West CHC is located, had 52 suspected overdoses attended by Toronto Paramedic Services from August 3, 2017, to August 2, 2018. This is the 10th highest number of calls of all neighbourhoods in Toronto during that time period.

PQWCHC serve a significant number of people who inject drugs, including people who lack stable housing and engage in high-risk behaviours such as injecting alone, frequently, and in public. Compared to the City overall, there are disproportionately high numbers of people who inject drugs within the Queen West catchment area, as well as higher rates of emergency department visits due to drug use in Toronto.¹ A 2012 study of Queen West harm reduction clients found that 11% had experienced an overdose (in the past 6 months), over a third reported public injecting, 15% said that they inject in public most often, almost a third reported injecting every day, and 29% reported regularly (from one to three or more times a week), 42.5% had evidence of a current/past infection with hepatitis C and 51% did not have stable housing.² PQW clients who participated in studies told researchers and us that they wanted and would use an integrated supervised consumption service and overdose prevention site.

¹ Supplemental data based on the TOSCA Study, provided as a personal communication, May 2014, by A. Bayoumi. Derived using geographic data for the years 2004-2008, using multiple administrative health databases including: National Ambulatory Care Reporting System, Discharge Abstract Database, Ontario Public Drugs Benefit Program, and physician billing claims.

² Challacombe L and Millson P. 2012. Toronto I-Track Report. Queen West Central Toronto Community Health Centre Site Report. Public Health Agency of Canada, March 2012.

Is this the only neighborhood where an Overdose Prevention Services service is being planned?

There are now numerous OPS and SCS (Supervised Consumption) sites that have opened around the province. Some of those that have already opened and are preventing overdose related harms and are linking people to health services for people who inject drugs: Toronto Public Health-The Works, South Riverdale Community Health Centre, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre's Queen West site and Fred Victor Centre, are operation SCS sites in Toronto. Toronto Overdose Prevention Society, St. Stephen's Community House, Regent Park Community Health Centre and Street Health are operating OPS sites. Multiple, small-scale OPS/SCS are needed because drug use is spread out in Toronto and because research has shown that people will not travel very far to use a supervised consumption service.

Will the overdose prevention service increase crime or drug use in our neighbourhood?

Overdose Prevention services do not contribute to more crime nor do they encourage increased drug use, initiate new users or increase public order problems by increasing local drug scenes or attracting drug users/dealers from other areas.³ In fact, studies of the impact of this type of service find that occurrences of things like thefts, vehicle break-ins, discarded needles and drug use in public spaces tend to decrease after they are established. Research in Toronto that has examined the connection between supportive housing programs (which included housing for people who use substances) and property values has found that property values actually increase, along with a reduction in crime.⁴

We are deeply committed to maintaining a safe environment for our community, staff and clients and will continue to strengthen our current strategies in order to address safety considerations for our community, staff and clients. Strategies include (but are not limited to):

- Zero-tolerance drug trafficking protocol
- Engaging our community stakeholders via our OPS Community Liaison Committee
- Having a designated OPS Contact Person (i.e. OPS Coordinator)
- OPS service delivery/design provisions (i.e. dedicated wait area and post-injection/consumption room)
- Regular monitoring of the parking lot, the parkette and the street outside our Centre (by staff and mounted security cameras)
- Scheduling extra client support workers during the summer and evening hours
- Providing comprehensive and responsive services and supports to clients in need, including crisis intervention, stabilization supports, and community outreach
- Working with local community police officers, participating in 14 Division's Community Police Liaison Committee and establishing protocols with Toronto Police Services

What are the benefits to these services?

International and Canadian research shows that overdose prevention services have benefits both for individuals using the services and for the community, including:

- Reducing the number of drug overdoses and deaths;
- Reducing risk factors leading to infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis;
- Increasing the use of detox and drug treatment services;
- Connecting people with other health and social services;

³ Supervised Injection Services Toolkit, Toronto Drug Strategy June 2013 (appendix A)

⁴ De Wolff, A. (2008). We are Neighbours: The Impact of Supportive Housing on Community, Social, Economic and Attitude Changes. Wellesley Institute: Toronto.

- Reducing the amount of publicly discarded needles;
- Not contributing to crime or increased drug use in the local community.

What has been the process for establishing this service?

We have been planning and gathering input on this service for many months and have utilized the information gathered by supervised consumption sites and other OPS's over many years. In 2017/18 three separate client consultations were conducted to gather client input on what type of OPS model they would prefer. Community partners were also consulted/informed that OPS was coming to Parkdale. The OPS site utilized the community consultation process used in 2016/17 by the Queen West site. Extensive consultations took place with local residents, businesses, people who use drugs, schools, churches and other community groups. Overall, the majority of people consulted regarding the addition of an SCS site at PQWCHC recognized the benefits of such a service.⁵

On December 7, 2017, Health Canada issued an exemption to Ontario to establish temporary overdose prevention sites across the province. On May 1, 2018, Parkdale received approval from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to operate an OPS. Unfortunately, on August 10, 2018 the Centre received notification from the Ministry to halt opening while they conduct a provincial review of OPS/SCS services. We remain confident that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's review of OPS and SCS will show the effectiveness of this program and we implore the Minister to expeditiously complete the review and lift the pause on the opening of these OPS services.

Is there an opportunity for community input?

Engaging with the local community and providing opportunities to raise any issues or concerns has always been important to PQWCHC. We are creating a Community Liaison Committee with diverse community representation, so we can work together to resolve any concerns that may arise. In addition, our OPS coordinator is available to respond to community members' concerns and questions. The Centre will also regularly reach out and engage the community in a planned and thoughtful way to ensure they are provided with updates and that concerns are addressed quickly.

Evaluation and data collection

Monitoring data on patterns of use of the site, drugs being injected, impacts of the service in the community, demographic data of service users, referrals and the uptake of other Centre services will be collected and analyzed.

Where can I get more information about the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre's OPS?

If you would like more information or have questions, please contact: Anne Marie DiCenso, Director of Urban Health Services (adicenso@ctchc.com), 416-703-8482 ext. 2211; Angela Robertson, Executive Director, 416-703-8482 ext.2321 (arobertson@ctchc.com); Lorraine Barnaby, SCS Manager, 416-703-8482 ext.2333 (lbarnaby@ctchc.com). We would be happy to speak with you or to come meet with your group. Please visit our website for more information about our Centre and our OPS: www.pqwchc.org.

⁵ <https://www.masslb.com/journal/sis>