



## A description of a peer-run supervised injection site for people who inject drugs

### What is the study about?

- Since the early 1990s, people have called for supervised injection sites (SIS) as a way to fight the ongoing health crisis among people who inject drugs (IDU) in Vancouver.
- In April 2003, a group of advocates opened the “327 SIS,” an unauthorized or “unsanctioned” SIS in the Downtown Eastside (DTES). It operated for 184 days, supervising more than 3,000 injections.
- At the same time, the Vancouver Police Department started a large-scale crackdown on the DTES drug market.
- The purpose of this study was to describe the unsanctioned SIS, including its operational design, the individuals accessing the site, and the use of the site.

### How was the study conducted?

- To describe the group of people using the SIS, a brief survey was given to 100 individuals who accessed the site between June 1 and August 27.
- People who worked at the SIS kept a detailed log of the number of people who used the SIS.
- Historical documentation was gathered and reviewed to get information about the operation and closure of the SIS.

### What did the study find?

- The SIS likely improved public health by giving IDU a clean and safe place to inject drugs.
- By allowing IDU to share drugs and assist one another in injecting, the SIS showed the benefits of a ‘low-threshold’, peer-driven SIS model and the importance of including IDU in the control and operation of SIS.
- Police presence around the SIS had a negative effect on access to the site.

#### The study asked:

How can we describe the unsanctioned SIS? What is the operational design of the unsanctioned SIS? Who is accessing the site? Under what conditions is the site being used?

*More should be done to accommodate high-risk IDU within the SIS environment, including those who need help injecting.*

#### The study found:

Public health was improved when IDU were given a clean and safe place to inject drugs in a low threshold, peer-driven environment, but police presence appeared to have a negative effect on this environment.

### Implications for policy: Why is the study important?

#### Benefits of a low-threshold, peer-driven SIS

- Low-threshold, peer-driven SIS environments were shown to be beneficial in helping local IDU inject safely.

#### Coordination between police and health services

- SIS will be most successful if police activities can be coordinated with health services.

#### Better accommodations for people who inject drugs

- More should be done to accommodate high-risk IDU within the SIS environment, including those who need help injecting.

Kerr T, Oleson M, Tyndall MW, Montaner J, Wood E. **A description of a peer-run supervised injection site for injection drug users.** *Journal of Urban Health*, 2005; 82(2): 267-275.