



Lessons to be learned from an unsanctioned user-run safe injection site

What is the study *about*?

- Since the early 1990s, the ongoing health crisis among people who inject drugs (IDU) in Vancouver has prompted the need for safe injection sites (SIS).
- Without legal approval, in April 2003, a group of activists opened a SIS at 327 Carrall Street in order to counter government inaction and a large-scale police crackdown in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).
- Despite limited financial support and continuous police harassment, the SIS stayed open until October, supervised more than 3,000 injections, and had almost 9,000 visits.
- The purpose of this study was to describe and learn from the opening, operation and closure of the site.

What did the study *find*?

- The unsanctioned SIS played an important role by providing a safe, supervised environment for IDU to inject drugs.
- IDU were able to organize themselves and resist policies that threatened their health and safety, despite legal risks.
- By doing so, they increased public awareness of the harmful effects of the crackdown and the need for an official SIS in the community.

The study found:

The peer-run SIS played an important role in promoting the health and safety of IDU.

The study asked:

What can we learn from the operation of the unsanctioned 327 Carrall Street SIS?

How was the study *conducted*?

- We reviewed all available historical documentation on the SIS, including site updates, meeting minutes, press releases and media stories.
- We also observed volunteers and participants to collect data first-hand.



The unsanctioned SIS at 327 Carrall Street

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

Multi-faceted approach

- The different methods that the organizers of the SIS used to achieve the same goal—such as council meetings, meetings with policymakers, protests, research and media—were shown to be highly effective.

Reliability and dedication

- The SIS relied on volunteers and local community members who were dedicated and accepted the risks, such as police harassment and even arrest.

Kerr T, Oleson M, Wood E. **Harm-reduction activism: A case study of an unsanctioned user-run safe injection site.** *Canadian HIV/AIDS Policy & Law Review*, 2004; 9(2): 13-19.