



## VANDU's Injection Support Team encourages safer injecting practices among IDUs

### What is the study *about*?

- In Vancouver approximately 40% of local injection drug users (IDUs) require assistance with injecting, and these individuals are more likely to experience non-fatal overdose and HIV infection.
- In 2005, members of the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) formed the Injection Support Team (IST) in response to the harms resulting from unsafe and assisted injecting.

#### The study asked:

What impact does the IST have on IDUs who receive support from the Team?

### How was the study *conducted*?

- A community-based research (CBR) project examined the operation of the program and the perspectives of individuals who receive support from the IST.
- The study documented the operation and impact of the IST through observation of team activities, over 30 interviews with team members, and 9 interviews with people helped by the team.

### What did the study *find*?

- The IST was formed to address systematic barriers to accessing the local supervised injection facility (SIF) resulting from operating regulations that prohibit assisted injections. Individuals who require help injecting are unable to access the facility and are often compelled to seek the assisted injections in the open drug scene.
- The IST is composed of VANDU members who possess extensive experience injecting and providing assisted injections. The IST engages with drug users through outreach activities in the open drug scene, 5 days a week. During outreach IST members provide instruction on proper injection techniques, as well as education regarding safer assisted-injection.
- Many individuals who received support from the IST reported that inability to self-inject restricts their access to the SIF. By providing injection education and help finding veins, the IST fostered safer injecting practices among individuals who receive support from the Team.
- The IST is addressing barriers to accessing the local SIF and reaching a group of drug users who have not been sufficiently engaged through existing efforts to address unsafe injecting.

#### The study found:

The IST fostered safer injecting practices among individuals who receive support from the Team.

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

#### Drug-user-led intervention

- The IST is a drug-user-led intervention that has successfully reached a vulnerable population of drug users, who do not have adequate access to the local SIF.

#### Helping to address unsafe and assisted injection

- The IST is helping to address unsafe and assisted injection in the Downtown Eastside.

Small W, Wood E, Tobin D, Rikley J, Lapushinsky D, Kerr T. **The injection support team: A peer-driven program to address unsafe injecting in a Canadian setting.** *Substance Use & Misuse*, 2012; 47(5): 491-501.