

From: Levy, Isra

Sent: Thursday, August 24, 2017 3:38 PM

To: 'City Council'; Atul Kapur; Chernushenko, David; Fleury, Mathieu; Jo-Anne Poirier; Lewis Leikin; McKenney, Catherine; Peter Tilley; Qadri, Shad; Qaqish, Michael; Suzanne Pinel; Taylor, Mark

Cc: Kanellakos, Steve; Bordeleau, Charles J (Police)

Subject: Overdose Prevention Ottawa

Chair Qadri and Members of the Board of Health, Mayor Watson and Members of Council,

Late yesterday Ottawa Public Health (OPH) became aware of an intention by members of the public to open a “pop-op” overdose prevention site in Ottawa. To date, Ottawa Public Health has not been involved in this initiative.

Members of Council may be aware that supervised injection services (SIS), such as those proposed by the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, the Somerset West Community Health Centre and Ottawa Inner City Health, must apply to the Federal Government for and receive an exemption from the federal Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) in order to operate.

As a public health intervention, SIS have been shown to help reduce overdoses and transmission of bloodborne diseases and help reduce community issues such as public drug use and discarded needles. Moreover, they serve as a bridge to other important health and social services, including counselling, health teaching, medical treatment, referrals to drug treatment, housing and income support.

Based on the limited information available with respect to the current initiative to open a “pop-up” overdose prevention site, this concept appears to be consistent with peer overdose prevention programs, including OPH’s own Peer Overdose Prevention Program (POPP), which has been operating since 2012 and which trains peers (people who inject opioids) to intervene during an overdose by administering naloxone. However, the group speaking to the idea appears to have no formal legal construct, nor to have initiated any application to the federal government for an exemption as described above.

As you will be aware, since early 2017 OPH has intensified our work, with various community partners, in preparing for and responding to opioid overdoses. Some of the key activities have included:

- working to enhance naloxone access, distribution and training; and
- disseminating information on overdose awareness and prevention.

With respect to the latter (messaging), key messages have included “*Don’t use alone*” and “*Carry naloxone*”. These messages are also consistent with peer overdose prevention programs, which are not a medical service per se, but aim to ensure that drug consumption, if it is to occur, is done in the presence of someone who is trained and ready to intervene in the event of an overdose.

In February 2017, I testified before the Senate’s Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in support of Bill C-224 – *The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* to amend the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*. This Bill, which became law in May 2017, provides an exemption from possession of substance charges for Canadians seeking medical or law enforcement assistance when a person is suffering from an overdose. This is also consistent with peer overdose prevention programs.

In summary, peers play an important part in preventing overdoses and OPH supports peer overdose prevention programs. OPH also works with over 20 community agencies to provide harm reduction services in Ottawa and is actively working with municipal and community agencies to address the opioid crisis in our community, which includes increasing overdose peer support in the community and ensuring naloxone is readily available to prevent overdoses. Therefore, though not involved in this initiative to date, OPH stands ready to work with partners who have a common goal of saving lives from potential overdoses.

I have asked members of my team to reach out expeditiously to individuals associated with this initiative to offer assistance in ensuring responsible and high quality peer support, aligned with the work being done by OPH and our partners in the community.

Sincerely,

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