

MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

TO: Chair and Members, Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit, Mayor and Member of Ottawa City Council

DESTINATAIRE : Président et membres, Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa, Maire et membre du Conseil municipal d'Ottawa

FROM: Dr. Isra Levy, Medical Officer of Health,  
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DATE: September 12, 2017

12 septembre 2017

**SUBJECT: Recent Developments - Ottawa Public Health (OPH) Programming and Partnerships – Opioid Crisis**

**OBJET : Évolution récente - Programmes et partenariats de Santé publique Ottawa (SPO) - Crise des opioïdes**

**PURPOSE**

Further to my email of August 24, 2017, I am writing to advise you of recent developments with regard to Ottawa Public Health (OPH) programming and partnerships, specifically regarding our community's response to the province wide opioid crisis in this city. In particular, I am advising that in light of the urgent health risk which currently exists I am recommending immediate steps be taken to provide enhanced harm reduction services in the form of supervised injection services (SIS) under the auspices of the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre's (SHCHC) approved SIS, as further described below.

## BACKGROUND

As previously noted, since early 2017 OPH has intensified its work with various community partners in seeking to prevent as well as preparing for and responding to opioid overdoses in our community. Key activities have included: working to enhance naloxone distribution and training; enhanced surveillance of overdoses across Ottawa; and disseminating information on overdose awareness and prevention. Over 20 community agencies provide harm reduction services in Ottawa, and many have been increasing supports for peers responding to overdoses in the community and ensuring naloxone is readily available to temporarily reverse overdoses when they occur.

One partner, the SHCHC, intends to expand its service offerings in the fall to include SIS in its integrated addictions program. The Board of Health has previously supported the concept of SIS as part of integrated programs offered by harm reduction program partners. Members will be aware that, in order to operate, supervised injection services (SIS) such as those proposed by SHCHC, as well as the Somerset West Community Health Centre and Ottawa Inner City Health, it is necessary to apply to the Federal Government for and to receive an exemption from the federal Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA). At this time, amongst Ottawa provider agencies, only the SHCHC has received such an exemption. It is under the auspices of the SHCHC that OPH is proposing to partner to offer interim SIS services at OPH's Sexual Health Clinic at 179 Clarence Street.

### Current Trends & Developments:

The historical overdose trends we are seeing in Ottawa are concerning. Between 2005 and 2016, the number of overdose deaths in Ottawa per year has doubled. While the focus is mostly on fentanyl, other opioids are involved in these overdoses as well as other kinds of drugs, including alcohol, and combinations of multiple drugs. According to Public Health Ontario's analysis of Coroner data up to 2016, there were 40 opioid-related deaths during 2016, and this number has been increasing each year during the past five years.

To date in 2017, we are seeing an average of nearly 120 emergency room visits for suspected opioid overdose each month in Ottawa, compared with fewer than 100 per month in 2016. Starting in June 2017, there has been a significant increase in opioid overdoses in Ottawa. Ottawa Paramedic Services reported over double the number of naloxone administrations during June compared with the monthly average during January to May. There has also been a 22% increase in **suspected** opioid overdose-

related emergency department (ED) visits during June, July and August, compared with January through May.

The Ottawa Police Service reported attending more suspected **opioid** overdose deaths **starting in May**. Anecdotal information from community groups and other service agencies also points to an increase in overdoses and deaths, many of which may not be seen by paramedics, emergency departments or police. High concentrations of overdose activity are in ByWard Market, Lowertown, Centretown, Sandy Hill, and Carlington, as measured by the residence of ED patients during 2017.

Last month, OPH learned of an unsanctioned “pop-up” overdose prevention site operating in a City of Ottawa park. OPH has visited the Overdose Prevention Ottawa (OPO) pop-up site and continues to encourage OPO to work with the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre and other local harm reduction service providers to bring the offered services into the local health system. In the first 17 days of operations, OPO reported that they had seen over 500 visits to their site.

#### **Proposed Interim SIS at Clarence Street:**

In light of pressing epidemiological trends and recent developments in the community, I believe there is an urgent and immediate need for enhancement to harm reduction services to include SIS in our city. OPH has been actively working with the SHCHC to explore options to expedite the delivery of supervised injection services. The current timeline for the opening of the Health Canada-approved SIS at the SHCHC’s Nelson Street facility is late October 2017. As a result, OPH is working with the SHCHC to seek approval from Health Canada for an interim SIS to enhance existing harm reduction services offered through OPH’s Site program at 179 Clarence Street, with operations commencing as soon as practicable once required approvals are obtained. This response will allow us to address the ever-growing public health crisis and the continued need for opioid overdose prevention services.

This proposal would see the interim SIS operate under the Health Canada exemption granted to the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre in July 2017, with an addendum that the services be provided on an interim basis at a satellite site, the OPH clinic on Clarence Street. The proposed satellite SIS would be available 7 days a week, with hours of operation to be confirmed. Services would be provided by current qualified employees of OPH in accordance with both the requirements of Health Canada, and with applicable policies and procedures of the SHCHC for the SIS. To that end, I am working on finalizing an operational Memorandum of Agreement between OPH and SHCHC to set out the functioning of the satellite SIS, subject to approval by Health

Canada for the Satellite Clinic. It is important that these SIS be available as soon as operationally feasible. It is my intent to begin to offer these services as soon as we can responsibly do so, and we are aiming to achieve that within the next two weeks. I note that delegated authority to enter into such a conditional agreement is available to me via Section 20 of the *Delegation of Authority By-law* (By-law 2011-2, as amended), with subsequent approval to be sought from this Board as soon as possible (namely, in this case, during the September 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of Health).

I note as well that OPH is working with Ottawa Police Services (OPS), Corporate Security and Ottawa Community Housing Safety Services to ensure safety for staff, clients, and the surrounding community.

In April 2016, I issued a statement on the next steps to [addressing substance misuse in the community](#). In June 2016, the Ottawa Board of Health adopted the report titled [Enhanced Harm Reduction Services in Ottawa – Guiding Principle and Next Steps](#) and in June 2016, staff proceeded with a city-wide [public consultation process](#) described therein, the [results](#) of which were released on September 2, 2016.

Among the consultation's findings:

- 66% of respondents thought that having supervised injection services available would be beneficial.
- 60% of respondents thought that offering harm reduction services in more areas of the city would be beneficial.

As has been its long-standing practice, OPH continues to monitor the situation and to work alongside and in support of partners, including local shelters, other local harm reduction service providers, peer-led services and the Ottawa Overdose Prevention and Response Task Force, who all share a common goal of saving lives from potential overdoses. OPH acknowledges that while SIS is an important component of any comprehensive approach to working with people who inject drugs, it will not solve all the issues related to the current opioid crisis.

As Members will appreciate, this situation is evolving rapidly. I am grateful for your confidence in enabling me to take the steps outlined above, which I have deemed necessary. It is my intention to bring forward an update to the Board of Health at its meeting of September 18, 2017 and in doing so, to seek the Board's formal approval to operationalize the plans outlined in this memo with respect to an interim SIS at 179 Clarence Street.

Should Members have any questions in the interim, please feel free to call or email me directly. I can be reached at [Isra.Levy@ottawa.ca](mailto:Isra.Levy@ottawa.ca) or by phone at 613-580-2424, ext. 23681.

Sincerely,

***‘Original signed by’***

Dr./ D<sup>r</sup> Isra Levy

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