

Statement from the Waterloo Region Integrated Drugs Strategy on the Announced Closure of Consumption and Treatment Services in Ontario

The Waterloo Region Integrated Drugs Strategy (WRIDS) is deeply dismayed by the Government of Ontario's decision to close supervised consumption sites throughout the province, including the only Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) location in our Region. Supervised consumption sites save lives by providing harm reduction supports and are backed by a robust base of evidence. The closure of the Kitchener CTS site will result in widespread harms, including increased preventable deaths of community members.

The WRIDS applauds increasing access to treatment and recovery supports for those who are ready, however, the announced pivot to a singular focus on treatment and recovery, paired with a prohibition on the harm reduction supports of supervised consumption, safer supply, and needle exchange programs, will result in widespread health harms including increased transmission of infectious diseases like HIV and Hepatitis C.

The WRIDS strongly believes that only a comprehensive approach to substance use can have the desired effect in our community, and that the harm reduction provided by CTS sites is a foundational element to a comprehensive approach. This is why the establishment and on-going operation of the Kitchener CTS site is a cornerstone of Waterloo Region's Integrated Drugs Strategy, and the impact of the CTS site's closure will undermine the strategy as a whole.

Supervised consumption sites have been repeatedly shown to reduce opioid overdose morbidity and mortality, improve harm reduction access, improve access to addiction treatment and recovery programs, while showing no increase in crime.¹ This robust evidence base is in line with results from evaluations of the Kitchener CTS.

Since the opening of the Kitchener CTS in 2019 there have been 1,031 overdoses on site, with 1,031 overdoses reversed. As a result, due to the life-saving support of the CTS, there have been zero deaths due to overdose on site.² The WRIDS is further concerned about the broader impacts on the overall healthcare system, as more strain will be put on our overburdened paramedics and hospital emergency rooms.

The 2023 evaluation of the Kitchener CTS reveals improved harm reduction behaviours in clients who utilize the service: "Since coming to the CTS, 83 percent of respondents

¹ [Supervised Injection Facilities as Harm Reduction: A Systematic Review](#)

² [Region of Waterloo Consumption & Treatment Services Dashboard](#)

reported re-using supplies less often, 74 per cent reported using alone less often, 61 per cent reported overdosing less often, and 69 per cent reported using drugs in public spaces less often.”³ Additionally, the Kitchener CTS site provides low-barrier access and referrals to addiction treatment services such as addictions counselling, methadone therapy, residential treatment, withdrawal management services, and other supports.

Finally, empirical data provided from Waterloo Region Police Services has demonstrated no increase in crime in the area surrounding the CTS. “There was no clear change in the trends related to the CTS opening in 2019 for the proportion of all of the calls to Waterloo Region Police Service within 400 metres of the CTS from 2011 to 2021.”⁴

All together, the evidence strongly supports the continued operation of safe consumption services as a lifesaving measure in the face of the on-going and devastating crisis of preventable death caused by the drug toxicity crisis. Yesterday’s announcement reflects a step backwards, away from years of evidence-based lifesaving healthcare, that will result in preventable death by not only closing the existing CTS site in Kitchener, but also by making it difficult or impossible to open a substitute site or additional sites within our Region.

The Waterloo Region Integrated Drugs Strategy urges the Government of Ontario to reverse the decision to prohibit lifesaving harm reduction supports and instead invest in a comprehensive approach to substance use that includes the full spectrum of care, from harm reduction to treatment and recovery supports.

Media Contact:

Cameron Dearlove, Chair, Waterloo Region Integrated Drugs Strategy Steering Committee

camerond@porchlightcnd.org

³ [Consumption and Treatment Services in Kitchener Evaluation](#)

⁴ [Consumption and Treatment Services in Kitchener Evaluation](#)