

**Support for Supervised Injection Sites (SIS)  
Proposed Federal Bill C-65 *Respect for Communities Act, 2013*  
Public Health Physicians of Canada Position Statement**

July 10, 2013

Supervised injection services (SIS) have been implemented in Europe, Australia and Canada to help reduce the harms of injection drug use. A SIS is a health service that provides a safe and hygienic environment where people can inject pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of trained staff. Over 90 SISs are operating today around the world.

Extensive studies and peer-reviewed research from around the world have documented the positive public health and public safety outcomes of SIS services. This was fully recognized in the judgement of the Supreme Court in September 2011. This includes measured scientific evidence such as reductions in overdose deaths; reductions of unsafe injection practices; reductions in behaviours that cause HIV and hepatitis C infection (e.g., sharing injection supplies); increased use of withdrawal management and addiction treatment services; reductions in public drug use; reductions in publically discarded needles; and no increases in crime in the area surrounding the SIS.

Health experts and professional groups, including the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Nurses Association, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, l'Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Institut national de santé publique du Québec, the Health Officers Council of BC and the Urban Public Health Network, have expressed support for SISs in Canada. Public Health Physicians of Canada (PHPC) is maintaining its position as part of this consortium of health experts with its continued support of SISs; and our organization also supports the recommendations contained in the City of Toronto July 2013 Board of Health report entitled, *Supervised Injection Services in Toronto*<sup>1</sup>.

The Toronto Board of Health report and the Report of the Public Health Director, Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal (*Toward supervised injection services: Report of a feasibility study on the implementation of regional supervised injection services in Montréal*<sup>2</sup>) demonstrate the scientific evidence and social/community and public safety need for SISs in these two cities. These reports also detail actions required by the federal and provincial governments for the successful implementation of SISs. This includes support for appropriate funding, and specifically, approval by the federal Minister of Health for an exemption under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (CDSA).

These actions may not seem an insurmountable goal in light of the 2011 Supreme Court Decision related to Ministerial approval (exemption) for SISs. However, on June 6,

2013, the federal government introduced Bill C-65, entitled the *Respect for Communities Act*, which includes 26 requirements that must be addressed in each application for the operation of a SIS.

The 26 requirements of the proposed Bill, as currently drafted, are extremely onerous and disproportionate to what is required for other health services. They stretch beyond the scope and spirit of the 2011 Supreme Court of Canada ruling, including, and above all else, the Minister's discretion in deciding whether to approve a request for an exemption that must be exercised in a way that respects the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and "aim to strike the appropriate balance between achieving public health and public safety goals."

The requirements of proposed Bill C-65, however, would pose significant barriers for health services applying for a CDSA exemption. Many requirements relate to detailed documentation of acceptable community support and consultation without information on what constitutes "acceptable" consultation, and with no indication as to whose opinions of support/opposition, or what level of information and research, is required.

Like many other health experts, professional associations, and community organizations, the PHPC opposes Bill C-65, as drafted, and is calling on the federal government to develop a more reasonable CDSA exemption application process - a process that is developed in consultation with provincial governments and ministries of health across the country, health experts and professionals, the public health and public safety sectors, and communities members, including people who use drugs.

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<sup>1</sup>City of Toronto Board of Health, July 10, 2013 accessed at <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.HL23.1> July 9, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal, 2011, accessed at [http://publications.santemontreal.qc.ca/uploads/tx\\_asssmpublications/isbn978-2-89673-246-3.pdf](http://publications.santemontreal.qc.ca/uploads/tx_asssmpublications/isbn978-2-89673-246-3.pdf) July 10, 2013.