

About Overdose Prevention Sites

What are Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS)?

OPS are evidence-based, cost-effective health services. OPS offer support, supervision, and overdose response to people using substances that they got from somewhere else. OPS are part of a broad spectrum of care. They exist alongside services like supportive housing, mental health support, and addictions treatment.

OPS in British Columbia

A 2016 Ministerial Order states that OPS are a medically necessary health service. OPS are endorsed federally by Health Canada and provincially by BC's Provincial Health Officer, Coroner, and Ministries of Health and Mental Health and Addictions.

BC has [best practices](#) in place to ensure OPS operate effectively and safely. These include guidance for staff training and staffing ratios, operational protocols, occupational health and safety requirements, and data collection standards. The [BC Community Guide on harm reduction](#) provides examples of how some communities have addressed concerns related to safety and litter.

OPS are currently operating effectively in all health authorities. There is still significant work remaining to ensure all people who would benefit have access to an OPS. Crime and nuisance issues are complex and driven by many factors such as poverty and social exclusion. Rates of reported crime changes when the amount of crime changes, but also because of changes in policing practices or reporting rates. Collaborative work with local residents, government, peer-led organizations, and the regional health authority are important for maximizing the benefits and minimizing potential negative impacts of OPS.

Summary of Impacts

OPS prevent overdose deaths, reduce the harms of illicit drug use, and support people who use drugs (PWUD) to connect to services. This is a safer alternative than using alone, on the street, or in an unsafe environment.

OPS can:

- Prevent deaths
- Reduce harms of drug use (e.g., infection)
- Increase social connectedness and support for PWUD
- Help PWUD access more health services & treatment
- Reduce drug-related litter
- Reduce drug use in public

OPS have **not**:

- Increased crime
- Increased nuisance complaints
- Encouraged or increased drug use
- Attracted new people who use drugs into the area

"We are, I think, as a community quite pleased with the [overdose prevention site] service that they've been able to provide and the number of deaths that they've been able to prevent by having the service in our community. We encourage the staff to continue doing what they are doing. They have been very good neighbours to the businesses around them."
- Susan Lehman, Downtown Vernon Association, Global News ("Downtown Vernon Association expresses 'guarded optimism' about overdose prevention site")

A positive BC example

Community Impacts of Overdose Prevention Sites: An Evidence Review

Brief Review of Evidence

How we Reviewed the Evidence

This evidence^a is primarily from peer-reviewed literature. Peer-review means at least two researchers who do not know the study's authors assessed each study's quality and validity. Literature reviews collect, analyze, and synthesize all studies on a topic in a systematic way.

Peer-reviewed literature reviews are usually higher quality than organizational reports or commissioned studies because they use large amounts of research that have been assessed to make sure they meet standards for accuracy, validity, significance, and relevance.

OPS and Drug Use

For community members who use illicit drugs, OPS support safer drug use and reduce the risk of death and drug use-related harm [1,2,3,4,5]. OPS also help connect people with health services and addictions treatment [1,2,3,5,6].

People who do not use illicit drugs (the general public) are not more likely to start using drugs because of an OPS [7]. Those who used drugs and then stopped are not more likely to start using drugs again because of an OPS [8].

OPS and Crime

Some people have concerns that opening an OPS may increase crime. Existing evidence finds that OPS are not associated with increased crime, including drug trafficking, assaults, or robbery [2,3,5,9].

OPS and Nuisance

Many communities have significant concerns before an OPS opens. The evidence shows that OPS decrease public drug use and reduce drug-related litter [2,3,5]. They are not associated with an increase in formal nuisance complaints [3,5], although several studies found some residents noticed more nuisance activity [10,11]. Research has also found that community members have fewer concerns once OPS start providing services [12].

OPS and New Residents

Most PWUD do not travel more than a kilometer to access an OPS [13]. As a result, OPS mostly serve existing nearby residents [3]. Other harm reduction initiatives such as syringe dispensing services also have not drawn new residents to the area [14]. Findings like these suggest that OPS will not attract more PWUD to the area [13, 15]. In fact, PWUD's limited travelling highlights the value of having multiple OPS available within communities.

Conclusion

The results of this review indicate that OPS are necessary, safe, and effective health services for community members who use drugs. Evidence also shows that OPS are not associated with significant negative impacts on neighbours and businesses.

Additional Resources

- [Overview of international literature: Supervised injecting facilities & drug consumption rooms](#)
- [Evidence brief: Crime and public order: Do supervised consumption services impact crime and public order?](#)
- [BCCDC & Provincial Health Officer position statement on observed consumption services](#)

a. Evidence includes work on supervised consumption sites as well, given that these are not well distinguished in the literature

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References

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