

## Closing Ottawa's only 24/7 supervised consumption site puts people and communities at risk

*Statement on behalf of Ottawa Inner City Health (OICH) Physicians regarding the impacts of OICH's supervised consumption site closure adjacent to the ByWard Market*

As Ottawa Inner City Health physicians, we care for people who are often unseen and underserved within our community's health-care system. Every day, we work alongside nurses, people with lived expertise, and outreach teams to meet people where they are with care grounded in dignity and compassion.

We are profoundly concerned about the closure of Ottawa's and Canada's only 24/7 supervised consumption site (SCS) this June and its impact on our patients, community and integrated health and social services, including referrals to treatment, harm reduction, case management, as well as housing and food supports. Evidence from other cities shows the effects of these closures extend beyond the people who use drugs, and affect their families, communities and health-care workers alike.

Following SCS closures in Ontario from April 2025:

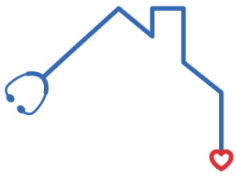
- EMS-treated opioid toxicities increased by 70 per cent across the province within six months
- In Toronto, EMS calls rose 82 per cent from 192 in March 2025 to 350 in January 2026, reversing a prior decline
- Emergency department visits increased 67 per cent, from 608 visits (March 2025) to 1,015 (September 2025)
- Probable opioid-related deaths rose 20 per cent (108 in April to 129 in October 2025)

As in other Ontario cities, our site will close this June. Located in the ByWard Market, and known as the "Trailer", it has been a critical point of safety and connection. It prevents overdoses, identifies infections early on, and connects people to mental health care, comprehensive addiction treatment, primary care, and housing support. It is also where trust is built between health-care providers and those who use the site, often after many years of trauma and difficult experiences within the health-care system. We understand that the province's decision to close this site is, unfortunately, final.

We know that closing the Trailer will not stop drug use. It will shift into alleyways, doorways, transit stations, and public washrooms, where people are alone, in unmonitored environments. Without medical supervision, the risk of fatal overdose is far higher when there is no one to recognize an overdose and administer naloxone and other first aid. We can expect to see more visible public drug use, more emergency calls and increased pressure on paramedic and police services in the Market and surrounding Lowertown neighbourhoods.

May 28, 2026

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# Ottawa Inner City Health

Healthcare. Harm Reduction. Hope.

These effects of the closure will extend across the community. Our clients, citizens, healthcare workers and frontline staff will be left to manage overdoses and health crises without on-site medical support. Visitors will encounter more visible drug use, while emergency responders will face increased calls for preventable medical care, diverting resources from other areas in the city. . Our organization has regularly heard this is not the environment the citizens of Ottawa are hoping for our city's downtown core.

The effects will also strain our health-care system. More overdoses, withdrawal and related infections in unmonitored settings will increase emergency department visits and hospital admissions, leading to longer wait times for all patients. Reduced access to sterile supplies will also increase the risk of HIV and Hepatitis C transmission.

There are many other efforts in place to improve downtown safety. The Block Leaders program connects people in crisis to care, while the Targeted Engagement and Diversion (TED) program at Shepherds of Good Hope provides 24/7 monitoring for people under the influence, allowing them to safely detox in the community. As a result, 87 per cent of participants do not require hospital transfer. These programs show how community-based, harm-reduction principled care improves outcomes and reduces pressure on emergency services but are only part of the solution.

As physicians who live and work in this city, we have seen how compassionate, evidence-based care saves lives and creates safer communities. We urge local officials to work with us, other local health-care providers and communities to mitigate the serious, preventable health and safety consequences of this closure.

Now is the time for all of us to come together as a community and support those most at risk.

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## **About Ottawa Inner City Health:**

Since 2001, Ottawa Inner City Health (OICH) has provided essential care for people experiencing homelessness and complex health challenges. Through partnerships with shelters, hospitals, and community providers, we deliver equitable, evidence-based care rooted in harm reduction, kindness and compassion.

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