



## STUDY PROTOCOL: LOOKING AT ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF DISTRIBUTING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PAYMENTS TO REDUCE DRUG-RELATED HARMS

### BACKGROUND

- Social assistance payments are an important source of income for people living in poverty. However, the current distribution system, where all recipients are paid once a month on “cheque day” has severe health and social consequences for people who use drugs.
- For people who use drugs, cues in their environment can exert strong influence on their patterns of use.
- Receiving social assistance payments can act as a cue for intensified drug use that is magnified when many people around them receive their money on the same day.
- We want to know if changing the timing of payments can reduce these social cues and if giving payments twice a month can help level out drug use over the course of the month, reducing harmful spikes around cheque day.

### QUICK FACT

*INTENSIFIED DRUG USE FOLLOWING CHEQUE DAY LEADS TO INCREASES IN OVERDOSES AND OTHER DRUG-RELATED HARMS AS WELL AS SPIKES IN DEMAND FOR HEALTH AND POLICE SERVICES.*

### METHOD

- Volunteer participants receiving social assistance and who use drugs are randomly assigned for six months to one of three groups:
  1. Payment as usual (generally the last Wednesday of the month),
  2. Payment once a month, not during the week of cheque issue, and
  3. Payment in two installments, not during the week of cheque issue.
- We are collecting information about drug use, drug-related harm, and service use and will compare these outcomes across the three study groups.

### IMPLICATIONS

- The harms associated with cheque day are widely acknowledged among community members and have been documented by over 20 years of research.
- This study will help us determine whether there is a way to distribute social assistance to better support population health outcomes.

Richardson L, Laing A, Milloy M-J, Maynard R, Nosyk B, Marshall B, Grafstein E, Daly P, Wood E, Montaner J, Kerr T. **Protocol of The Impact of Alternative Social Assistance Disbursement on Drug-Related Harm (TASA) study: A randomized controlled trial to test payment timing and frequency among people who use illicit drugs.** *BMC Public Health*, 2016; 16: 668-686.

