



LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM AN UNSANCTIONED USER-RUN SAFE INJECTION SITE

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- Since the early 1990s, the ongoing health crisis among people who inject drugs (IDU) in Vancouver has prompted the need for safe injection sites (SISs).
- Without legal approval, in April 2003, a group of activists opened a SIS at 327 Carrall Street in order to counter government inaction and a large-scale police crackdown in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).
- Despite limited financial support and continuous police harassment, the SIS stayed open for 181 days, supervised over 3,000 injections, and had almost 9,000 visits.
- The purpose of this study was to describe and learn from the opening, operation, and closure of the site.
- All available historical documentation on the SIS were reviewed – including site updates, meeting minutes, press releases, and media stories.
- We also observed volunteers and participants to collect data first-hand.



QUICK FACT

THE PEER-RUN SIS PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PROMOTING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF IDUS.

FINDINGS

- The unsanctioned SIS played an important role by providing a safe, supervised environment for IDUs to inject drugs.
- IDUs were able to organize themselves and resist policies that threatened their health and safety, despite legal risks.
- By doing so, they increased public awareness of the harmful effects of the crackdown and the need for an official SIS in the community.

IMPLICATIONS

- The different methods that the organizers of the SIS used to achieve the same goal – such as council meetings, meetings with policymakers, protests, research, and media – were shown to be highly effective.
- The SIS relied on volunteers and local community members who were dedicated and accepted the risks, such as police harassment and even arrest.

Kerr T, Oleson M, Wood E. **Harm-reduction activism: A case study of an unsanctioned user-run safe injection site.** *Canadian HIV/AIDS Policy & Law Review*, 2004; 9(2): 13-19.

