

Supervised Consumption Services Needs Assessment

Northwestern Health Unit Region

Foreword and Executive Summary

Prepared by LBCG Consulting for Impact
in partnership with the Ontario Public
Health Association





Foreword and Acknowledgments

The drug crisis has brought to light the devastating effects substance use is having on individuals, families, and communities across Canada. Potential harms resulting from higher-risk substance use can include impacts on an individual's mental health, schooling or work, and relationships. Harms can also include financial struggles, legal problems, and threats to health and safety including overdose.

Opioid-related emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and deaths in the Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) catchment area saw considerable increases between 2019 and 2021. Opioid-related emergency department visits increased by 158%, opioid-related hospitalizations increased by 111%, and opioid-related deaths increased by 243% in the two-year period of 2019-2021. The opioid crisis is a serious concern for our region. In 2021, our region had higher rates than the rest of the province for all three opioid harms indicators (ER visits, hospitalizations, and deaths).

Substance use, and the related harms, are a community issue that requires community solutions. NWHU funded the Supervised Consumption Services Needs Assessment in 2022 to investigate one possible solution. NWHU hired *LBCG Consulting for Impact* to complete a supervised consumption services needs assessment in four communities - Dryden, Fort Frances, Kenora, and Sioux Lookout. An outside firm was chosen as they brought a wide range of expertise and dedicated time and resources to ensure a high quality and objective process and final product. This report provides substance use and supervised consumption services information relevant to the NWHU region. It breaks down the feedback provided by local partners, community members, and people who use drugs, and shares recommended next steps for the region and each of the four communities studied specifically.

We would like to acknowledge the community's participation in this needs assessment. The knowledge and experiences shared by people who use drugs, community partners, and community members has allowed this needs assessment to provide important data that can be used by our communities to move forward with community-based solutions. NWHU is pleased with the depth of information provided in this report and looks forward to seeing how communities come together to move this issue forward.

We would also like to thank LBCG and their research partners for the work they have done to complete this needs assessment and report over the last nine months.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Young Hoon'.

Dr. Kit Young Hoon, Medical Officer of Health

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marilyn Herbacz'.

Marilyn Herbacz, Chief Executive Officer

This needs assessment was funded and supported by NWHU and completed by LBCG Consulting for Impact and their research partners.



Executive Summary

The purpose of the needs assessment was to examine the substance use and related harms prevalence and patterns in the NWHU region and engage with local stakeholders and determine whether the NWHU region could benefit from supervised consumption services (SCS) in four communities in northwestern Ontario: Kenora, Dryden, Fort Frances, and Sioux Lookout.

The drug crisis has brought to light the devastating effects substance use is having on individuals, families, and communities across Canada. Observing the burden of the crisis in our region, the NWHU felt compelled to initiate a local assessment of SCS as a harm reduction strategy, as part of its mandate outlined in the Ontario Public Health Standards under the standards for Population Health Assessment and Substance Use and Injury Prevention. The NWHU is seeking solutions to address the following challenges:

- Reduce substance use related injuries, hospitalizations and deaths,
- Reduce the risk of infections from sharing or reusing drug-use equipment,
- Reduce public drug use and improperly discarded needles in our communities,
- Increase access to healthcare, treatment and supportive services for people who use drugs.

Examining the potential benefits of implementing SCS in the NWHU region was the focus of the needs assessment. Investigating the literature's evidence of SCS benefits or assessing the value of alternative harm reduction strategies or treatment services was not within the scope of this report. The undertaking for this needs assessment relies on the guidance and evidence base of Health Canada's *Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy*ⁱ, where SCS are recommended as an element of harm reduction within a comprehensive approach of prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement.

SCS are being implemented across Canada as they offer a range of low-barrier services to PWUD such as:

- hygienic and supportive spaces for drug consumption,
- sterile drug use equipment,
- peer support, and
- connections to supportive health and social services, including treatment.

Associated benefits to communities include the reduction of:

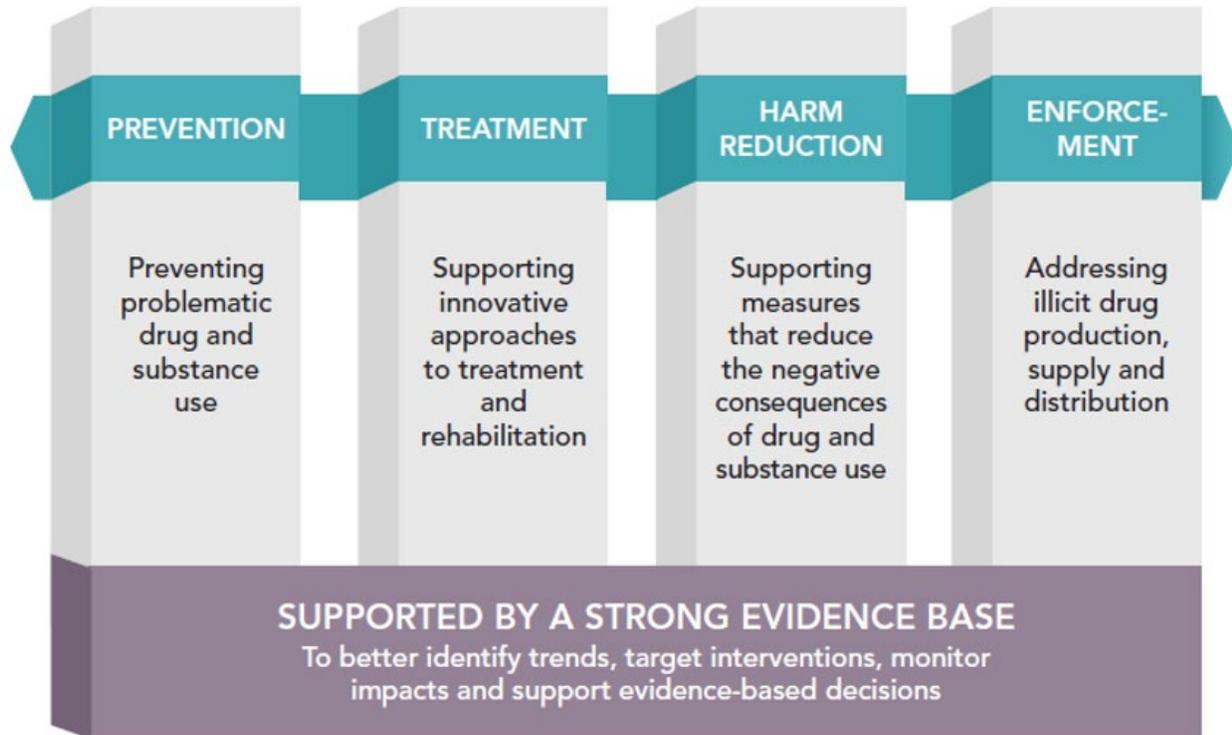
- overdoses and substance related harm
- harm to others and interactions of conflict,
- infections and spread of communicable diseases, and
- occurrence of discarded drug use supplies in public spaces.

Peer reviewed literature has found that SCS do not cause increases in crime or public nuisancesⁱⁱ. SCS can also address gender equity and the disproportionate risk of experiencing gender-based power relations and/or violence for women who use drugs.

Currently, there are no SCS in the NWHU region, with the closest in Ontario being in Thunder Bay, yet the region has some of the highest rates of substance related harms.

CANADIAN DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES STRATEGY

A COMPREHENSIVE, COLLABORATIVE, COMPASSIONATE AND EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO DRUG POLICY



Perspectives were heard from people who use drugs (PWUD), residents in the NWHU catchment area, community service providers and partners, municipal governments, and other key stakeholders. The needs assessment was sponsored and initiated by NWHU, which procured the services of a team of consultants to complete the needs assessment. The consultant team, LBCG Consulting for Impact in partnership with the Ontario Public Health Association, designed the needs assessment, collected the data, completed the analysis and wrote this report. NWHU owns the data and upon completion of the needs assessment, all data was transferred to NWHU, who has it on record and has access for future use.

This report outlines regional and then community-specific findings and recommendations for each of Sioux Lookout, Fort Frances, Dryden and Kenora.

Additional community-specific data of results outlined in this report may be made available upon request for community-specific SCS development purposes.

ⁱ Health Canada. *Canadian drugs and substances strategy*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/canadian-drugs-substances-strategy.html>

ⁱⁱ Levenson, T. W., Yoon, G. H., Davoust, M. J., Ogden, S. N., Marshall, B., Cahill, S. R., & Bazzi, A. R. (2021). Supervised Injection Facilities as Harm Reduction: A Systematic Review. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 61(5), 738–749. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2021.04.017>