

INFORMATION REPORT

TO: Mayor and Members Board of Health	WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE
COMMITTEE DATE: June 18, 2012	
SUBJECT/REPORT NO: Supporting Neighbourhoods in Managing Community Consequences of Addictions (BOH12008) (City Wide)	
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Council Direction:

This information report outlines a plan by Public Health Services (PHS) to realign services within current budgets to address issues identified in the community related to addictions thereby reducing harm to the community. This action plan aligns with the Corporate Priority Area of "Create Healthy Neighbourhoods".

Information:

Addictions and related issues, such as homelessness, disruptive behaviour and unsafe needle disposal, have been identified as a problem by various community groups to PHS. The Harm Reduction Program has a role to not only provide safe injection supplies to individual clients but to also help reduce harm to the community.

Three key areas for intervention are outlined below including:

1. Alcohol, Drug and Gambling social worker will provide support and education re: addictions to shelters and neighbourhoods to increase their capacity to deal with the consequences of addictions;
2. Enhancing the pick up of discarded needles in the community; and
3. Realigning needle exchange service hours to meet high demand times including Saturday evenings.

1. Addiction Issues in Shelters:

All shelter sites in Hamilton have identified difficulties managing drug and alcohol use related behaviours in clients who are disruptive or aggressive as well as the unsafe discarding of used needles within the shelters. Helping shelter staff understand addictions and related behaviours is key to supporting policy development and a plan of care for clients.

Public Health Services' (PHS) Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Services (ADGS) currently provide addiction counselling services on a drop in basis through PHS Street Health Clinics located at Wesley Centre and Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre. Additional ADGS social worker hours for the Harm Reduction Program will provide support to shelters and neighbourhoods to increase their capacity to develop solutions for issues arising from drug and alcohol use (i.e. client behaviour management policies, sharps disposal strategies in shelters). The intent is not for the social worker to see individual shelter clients but to assist staff at the site to develop strategies and skills to deal with difficult clients with addictions. The social worker will offer education on harm reduction principles in the community. As well, the worker will provide input and support to community development projects to address addiction and injection drug use in Hamilton.

ADGS social worker hours in addition to current time provided at Street Health Clinics will be provided through the Harm Reduction Program up to an extra 1.5 days per week and funded from existing budget.

2. Needles in the Community:

In alignment with Ontario Public Health Standards requirement for PHS to provide harm reduction services, PHS operates a mobile van (The Van) and offers fixed sites for needle exchange. During interactions with clients, staff request the return of used needles and provide free sharps containers. Despite best efforts, some needles are not returned to the program may end up being discarded on public or private property.

Clients who inject drugs in open or public spaces often discard their used needles quickly to prevent detection by police or by staff at service agencies such as shelters. Groups such as Beasley Neighbourhood Association and private businesses are struggling with the problem of discarded needles in parks and on private property. Discarded needles carry a low risk of infection but can result in injury to children in parks, lessen the enjoyment of public spaces and are disturbing to property owners.

Last year, public health inspectors (PHI) in the Environmental Health program responded to approximately 100 complaints about discarded needles. Some of these calls were from other city staff who encountered needle(s) during road work or park maintenance. Needle pick up is safely done with knowledge and equipment and does not require a PHI to respond to a site where City staff are already working. PHS Environmental Health staff have met with Planning and Economic Development

(Municipal Law Enforcement) and Public Works to identify efficiencies and develop policies for City staff to safely pick up needles when encountered during routine work in public spaces. The Customer Contact Centre will be updated with a directory of who to call for public space needle clean up once policies and training of all involved city staff are completed.

Currently, The Van staff will receive containers of sharps from landlords or property owners but do not clean up private property. If Environmental Health staff receive a complaint from private property owners, they are offered information how to safely pick up discarded needles found on their properties and respond only if there is a high risk location identified.

In response to the gap in service for needles in private areas, PHS will partner with The AIDS Network to respond to complaints of needles on private property from Monday to Friday. An outreach team of volunteers will be developed by The AIDS Network to conduct sweeps and pick up of areas known to have discarded needles. Extra staff hours up to 1 to 1.5 days per week and needle disposal costs will be funded from within current PHS budget.

3. Weekend Needle Exchange Hours:

In April 2012, Marchese Healthcare discontinued needle exchange as a service provided to the community due to resource issues. Marchese's pharmacy was open for needle exchange Monday to Saturday. In addition to losing needle exchange at Marchese's, the needle exchange program also lost 24/7 needle exchange services at Wesley Centre when Wesley's overnight hours ended July 2010. These needle exchange service hours have not been replaced.

Currently, there is only one needle exchange site open on weekends and is limited to the third Saturday morning of each month at Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre. Clients are at high risk of contracting blood borne infections if they do not have enough clean injection supplies on a weekend when substance use may be higher and may result in more needles being unsafely discarded in the community.

The Van program will begin offering Saturday evening services from 8 pm to midnight in partnership with The AIDS Network. These hours do not represent an increase in total needle exchange service hours due to the loss of other needle exchange sites in the City. In addition to distributing clean injection supplies, the mobile Van is key to collecting used needles from clients. Program statistics show that the majority of used sharps are collected through the mobile Van.

An increase of 5 hours per week for Saturday evening Van shifts will be funded from existing budget. The program has adequate funding to support any increase in demand for injection supplies and subsequent disposal costs related to adding a Saturday evening shift.

Summary:

PHS has listened to concerns identified in the community and has developed this plan to support the management of consequences from addictions and to prevent harm to the community. It is important to recognize and balance the public's need for safe and enjoyable spaces with PHS' harm reduction program mandate and needs of clients with addictions.