



Southwestern Public Health Region:

Consumption and Treatment Services Feasibility Study Summary Report

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Southwestern Public Health and Collective Results Inc.

PREPARED BY:

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Southwestern Public Health's (SWPH) role is to work with community members to improve the health of people who live, work, learn, and play in our region of Oxford County, Elgin County, and the City of St. Thomas. Based on an assessment of the local data, we know that opioid substance use disorders¹ are a serious concern affecting our community. We have seen increasing harm from substance use over the past four years.

What the data says

Local evidence shows that opioid-related harms in our region increased between 2019 and 2021. When reviewing this data, we looked at rates, which tell you the number of times something occurs per 100,000 people. The data is shown in this way so that we can compare statistics between our region and Ontario as a whole. Opioid-related emergency department visits in our region are higher than the provincial rates, rising to almost 1.5x the provincial rate in 2021. Meanwhile, hospitalization rates have been higher in our region than in Ontario every year since 2011 (roughly twice the provincial rate in 2021). Finally, and most alarmingly, the rate of opioid-related deaths has also increased over time. The rate more than doubled between 2019 and 2021, passing the Ontario rate.

There is a need to explore other ways to improve the situation in our community, specifically by looking at initiatives that can save lives and reduce harms. One type of initiative, mentioned in the research, to decrease harms are consumption and treatment services (CTS). To better understand substance use concerns in our community and implement the recommendations from our local drug and alcohol strategies², we studied whether CTS would be possible locally.

Consumption and treatment services explained

CTS sites are places where people who use drugs can bring in their own substances and use them in a sanitary space with trained staff present. They also support and link individuals to health and social services (e.g., housing supports, wound care, rehabilitation referral, withdrawal management beds, etc.). CTS sites help the community by reducing overdoses, reducing the spread of infectious disease, increasing connections to supports for people who use drugs, and reducing injection drug use in public spaces.

¹ A substance use disorder is often referred to as an addiction. This is a disease that affects an individual's brain and behaviour; it leads to an inability to control the need to use the drug. (1)

² Drug and Alcohol strategies are a group of people who use substances and community partners who work together to reduce substance use related harms in a community.

The study

The study started in September 2022 and data was collected between January and March 2023. We interviewed people who use drugs and local politicians, completed focus groups with community partners and Indigenous-specific partners, and sent out a community-wide online survey.

The study has three objectives:

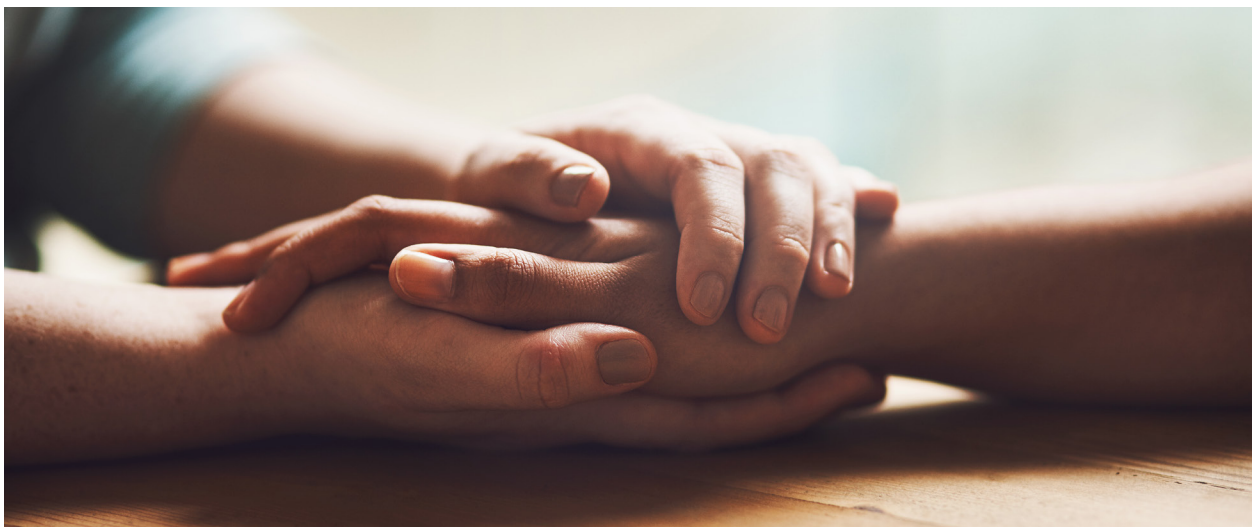
1. To determine if there is a **perceived need** for CTS in the SWPH region.
2. To assess the **buy-in and support** of CTS in the SWPH region.
3. To examine the **models, operations, and practical components** of offering CTS in the SWPH region.

An External Advisory Committee was formed to offer advice and support along the way. The committee was diverse and included people who use substances, Indigenous partners, health and community organizations, and municipal leaders.

The findings

We learned:

1. There was a perceived need for CTS among people who use substances, local politicians, and most community members who took part in this study.
2. There was support for a CTS site(s) locally, with the downtown areas of St. Thomas and Woodstock as the best locations, but not on the main street.
3. There was a strong preference for the embedded delivery modelⁱⁱⁱ for a CTS site(s), with the option of a mobile model for outreach in rural areas in Elgin and Oxford Counties. An embedded service model means that the CTS is part of another organization or service – not a stand-alone service.
4. CTS site(s) need wrap around services and the involvement of peer support.



ⁱⁱⁱ Embedded Model: Where the CTS site is embedded within other settings such as hospitals or shelters. (2)

Things that would help consumption and treatment services succeed

The following strategies were identified to support the success of a CTS site:

- Education for people who use drugs and community members on the purpose of a site(s);
- Reducing stigma and addressing myths; and
- Ensuring the site(s) is accessible, welcoming, and meets all clients with dignity and respect. One example of this would be hiring people with experience of substance use to work at the site.

Things that would cause potential issues for consumption and treatment services

The most frequent barriers to CTS site(s) success in the local community included the following:

- Choosing the right location;
- Lack of community buy-in;
- Common myths of CTS site(s); and
- Obstacles for potential clients to visit site(s).

Suggestions to address these barriers included the following:

- Clear education and communication with the community;
- Putting a well-researched planning process in place;
- Choosing locations that are accessible, inclusive, and promote trust;
- Including peers in roles both on-site and in outreach activities; and
- Ensuring a wide range of needed services are offered on-site.

Recommendations

The findings of the study led to the following recommendations:

1. SWPH will discuss potential operators and locations of facilities that could offer these services (CTS) in consultation with a variety of groups, including people who use drugs, Indigenous partners, community partners, business owners, etc.
2. Further education, consultation, and data collection with the general community and those partners identified in recommendation #1 to explore the impacts of CTS. This process will be informed by the experiences of CTS in other areas of Ontario (specifically areas similar in population to Woodstock & St. Thomas).
3. Pending the outcome of the consultation process outlined in recommendations #1 and #2, SWPH will help draft the Federal exemption application and get Letters of Support to aid the provincial funding application from the respective cities and locations (i.e., the City of St. Thomas and/or the City of Woodstock) based on community and partner readiness^v to take part.

For the data limitations of this study, please see page 50 of the Full Report titled *“An Exploration of the Need for and Feasibility of Consumption and Treatment Services: In the Southwestern Public Health Region”*.

^v “Community readiness refers to how prepared the community is to take action to address a particular health issue.” For any additional information, please visit the Rural Health Information Hub. (3)

References

1. Substance-related and addictive disorders. In: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-5. 5th ed. American Psychiatric Association; 2013. <https://dsm.psychiatryonline.org>. Accessed Aug. 15, 2022.
2. Supervised Consumption Services Operational Guidance [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/BC-SCS-Operational-Guidance.pdf>
3. Rural Health Information Hub. Community Readiness Model. [Online]; n.d. [cited 2023 May 17. Available from: <https://www.rural-healthinfo.org/toolkits/health-promotion/2/program-models/community-readiness#:~:text=Community%20readiness%20refers%20to%20how,not%20recognize%20the%20health%20issue>.



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