

Supervised Injection Facilities



Overview

Supervised injection facilities (SIFs) are controlled health care settings where people can more safely inject drugs under clinical supervision and receive health care, counseling and referrals to health and social services, including drug treatment.

SIFs – also called safer injection sites, drug consumption rooms and supervised injecting centers – are legally sanctioned facilities designed to reduce the health and public order issues often associated with public injection by providing a space for people to inject pre-obtained drugs in a hygienic environment with access to sterile injecting equipment and under the supervision of trained medical staff.^{1,2}

There are currently 92 SIFs operating in 62 cities around the world in eight countries (Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Luxembourg, Spain, Australia and Canada) – but none in the U.S.³ In June 2012, Denmark adopted legislation to permit local SIFs as well.⁴

SIFs can play a unique and vital role as part of a larger public health and treatment approach to drug policy. SIFs are intended to complement – not replace – existing prevention, harm reduction and treatment interventions.

SIFs Improve Safety and Health

Numerous evidence-based, peer-reviewed studies have proven the positive impacts of SIFs.⁵ These benefits include:

- 1) Increased uptake into addiction treatment, especially among people who distrust the treatment system and are unlikely to seek treatment on their own.^{6,7,8}
- 2) Reduced public disorder, reduced public injecting, and increased public safety.^{9,10,11}

- 3) Attracting and retaining a high risk population of people who inject drugs, who are at heightened risk for infectious disease and overdose.¹²
- 4) Reducing HIV and Hepatitis C risk behavior (i.e. syringe sharing, unsafe sex)^{13,14}
- 5) Reducing the prevalence and harms of bacterial infections.¹⁵
- 6) Successfully managing hundreds of overdoses and reducing drug-related overdose death rates.¹⁶
- 7) Cost savings resulting from reduced disease, overdose deaths, and need for emergency medical services.^{17,18}
- 8) Providing safer injection education, and a subsequent increase in safer injecting practices.¹⁹
- 9) Not increasing community drug use.²⁰
- 10) Not increasing initiation into injection drug use.^{21,22}
- 11) Not increasing drug-related crime.²³
- 12) Increased delivery of medical and social services.²⁴

Vancouver's *InSite*

Vancouver's SIF, *InSite*, has been the most extensively studied SIF in the world, with more than two dozen peer-reviewed articles now published examining its effects on a range of variables, from retention to treatment referrals to cost-effectiveness.²⁵

These reports are in line with reviews of the Australian²⁶ and European SIFs^{27,28} which show that these facilities have been successful in attracting at-risk populations, are associated with less risky injection behavior, fewer overdose deaths,²⁹ increased client enrollment in drug treatment services,³⁰ and reduced nuisances associated with public injection.³¹ For example, one recent study found a 30 percent

increase in the use of detoxification services among *InSite* clients.³²

InSite has proved to be cost-effective in terms of overdose and blood borne disease prevented as well.³³ One cost-benefit analysis of *InSite* estimates that the facility prevents 35 new cases of HIV each year, providing a societal benefit of more than \$6 million per year after accounting for the costs of the program.³⁴

“*InSite* saves lives. Its benefits have been proven. There has been no discernable negative impact on the public safety and health objectives of Canada during its eight years of operation.”

-Supreme Court of Canada, 2011.³⁵

InSite also saves lives. A recent study published in the prestigious journal *The Lancet* found that the fatal overdose rate in the immediate vicinity of *InSite* decreased by 35 percent since it began operating in 2003, while the rest of the city experienced a much smaller reduction of 9 percent.³⁶

A survey of more than 1000 people utilizing *InSite* found that 75 percent reported changing their injecting practices as a result of using the facility. Among these individuals, 80 percent indicated that the SIF had resulted in less rushed injecting, 71 percent indicated that the SIF had led to less outdoor injecting, and 56 percent reported less unsafe syringe disposal.³⁷

Overall, as a 2006 evaluation concluded, the SIF has produced a “large number of health and community benefits...and no indications of community or health-related harms.”³⁸

Recommendations

SIFs are a vital part of a comprehensive public health approach to reducing the harms of drug misuse. Local, state and national governments should explore the implementation of a legal supervised injection facility (at least at the pilot level) staffed with medical professionals to reduce overdose deaths, increase access to health services, and further expand access to safer injection equipment to prevent the transmission of HIV and hepatitis C.

The Drug Policy Alliance supports the efforts of many local communities in the U.S. to pursue SIF-based programs. In 2012, the New Mexico state legislature adopted a proposal to study the feasibility of a safer injection facility in the state – becoming the first state in the nation to consider this potentially life-saving intervention.³⁹

Local efforts to promote SIFs are ongoing in several forward-thinking cities, as well, including New York City and San Francisco – where both community stakeholders and people who inject drugs are in favor of such a step to reduce the harms of drug misuse.⁴⁰

SIFs, of course, cannot prevent all risky drug use or alleviate all drug-related morbidity and mortality. However, existing evidence demonstrates that they can be remarkably effective and cost-effective at improving the lives of people who inject drugs and the safety and health of their communities.

¹Evan Wood et al., “Service Uptake and Characteristics of Injection Drug Users Utilizing North America’s First Medically Supervised Safer Injecting Facility,” *American Journal of Public Health* 96 (2006): 770.

²Robert S. Broadhead et al., “Safer Injection Facilities in North America: Their Place in Public Policy and Health Initiatives,” *Journal of Drug Issues* 32 (2002): 329, 347–48; Benedikt Fischer et al., “Safer Injection Facilities (SIFs) for Injection Drug Users (IDUs) in Canada: A Review and Call for an Evidence-Focused Pilot Trial,” *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 93 (2002): 336; Craig L. Fry et al., “The Place of Supervised Injecting Facilities Within Harm Reduction: Evidence, Ethics and Policy,” *Addiction* 101 (2006): 465.

³Dagmar Hedrich, *European report on drug consumption rooms*. (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. 2004); Jo Kimber et al., “Drug Consumption Facilities: An Update Since 2000,” *22 Drug and Alcohol Review* 22 (2003): 227.

⁴See International Drug Policy Consortium, *Drug Consumption Rooms: Evidence and Practice* (June 2012),

<http://idpc.net/publications/2012/06/idpc-briefing-paper-drug-consumption-rooms-evidence-and-practice>; Salaam Semaan et al., "Potential role of safer injection facilities in reducing HIV and Hepatitis C infections and overdose mortality in the United States," *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 118 (2011): 100–110; and Dagmar Hedrich et al., *Drug consumption facilities in Europe and beyond in: Harm reduction: evidence, impacts and challenges* (2010: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Lisbon), http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_101273_EN_emcdda-harm%20red-mon-ch11-web.pdf.

⁵ See for example, Lisa Maher and Allison Salmon, "Supervised injecting facilities: how much evidence is enough?" *Drug and Alcohol Review* 26, no. 4 (2007): 351–353; and Semaan et al. 100–110.

⁶ Evan Wood et al., "Attendance at supervised injecting facilities and use of detoxification services," *New England Journal of Medicine* 354 (2006):2512-4; Evan Wood et al., "Summary of findings from the evaluation of a pilot medically supervised safer injecting facility," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 175 (2006):1399–404; Evan Wood et al., "Rate of detoxification service use and its impact among a cohort of supervised injecting drug users," *Addiction* 102 (2007):916–19.; Steffanie Strathdee and Robin Pollini, "A 21st-century Lazarus: the role of safer injection site in harm reduction and recovery," *Addiction* 102 (2007): 848–849; Kora DeBeck et al., "Injection drug use cessation and use of North America's first medically supervised safer injecting facility," *Drug & Alcohol Dependence* 113, no. 2-3 (2011):172-6.

⁷ Hedrich 2004; Jo Kimber and Kate Dolan, "Shooting gallery operation in the context of establishing a medically supervised injecting center: Sydney, Australia," *Journal of Urban Health* 84, no. 2 (2007):255-66.

⁸ KPMG, *Further evaluation of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre 2007-2011*, http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/mhdao/pdf/msic_kpmg.pdf

⁹ Evan Wood et al., "Changes in public order after the opening of a medically supervised safer injecting facility for illicit injection drug users," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 171 (2004): 731-734; Steven Petrar et al., "Injection Drug Users' Perceptions Regarding Use of a Medically Supervised Safer Injecting Facility," *Journal of Addictive Behaviors* 32, no.5 (2007):1088-1093; Jo-Anne Stoltz, et al., "Changes in injecting practices associated with the use of a medically supervised safer injection facility," *Journal of Public Health* 29, no. 1 (2007): 35-39.

¹⁰ Kora DeBeck et al., "Public injecting among a cohort of injecting drug users in Vancouver, Canada," *Journal Epidemiology Community Health* 63, no. 1 (2009):81-6.

¹¹ Allison Salmon et al., "Five years on: what are the community perceptions of drug-related public amenity following the establishment of the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre?" *International Journal of Drug Policy* 18 (2007):46–53.

¹² Hudson Reddon et al., "Use of North America's first medically supervised safer injecting facility among HIV-positive injection drug users," *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 23, no. 5 (2011): 412–422; Evan Wood et al., "Do supervised injecting facilities attract higher-risk injection drug users?" *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 29 no. 2 (2005):126-30; Wood et al., *American Journal of Public Health*, 2006; Maria J. Bravo et al., "Use of supervised injection facilities and injection risk behaviours among young drug injectors," *Addiction* 104, no. 4:614-619. 2009; Evan Wood et al., "Prevalence and correlates of hepatitis C infection among users of North America's first medically supervised safer injection facility," *Public Health* 119, no. 12 (2005):1111-5.

¹³ Semaan et al. 100–110; Thomas Kerr et al., "Safer injection facility use and syringe sharing in injection drug users," *Lancet* 366 (2005):316-8; Evan Wood et al., "Factors Associated with Syringe Sharing Among Users of a Medically Supervised Safer Injecting Facility," *American Journal of Infectious Diseases* 1 no. 1 (2005): 50-54; Thomas Kerr et al., "The role of safer injection facilities in the response to HIV/AIDS among injection drug users," *Current HIV/AIDS Report* 4 (2007):158–164; and Petrar et al.

¹⁴ Brandon D. L. Marshall, et al., "Condom use among injection drug users accessing a supervised injecting facility," *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 85, no. 2 (2009):121-6.

¹⁵ Will Small et al., "Accessing care for injection-related infections through a medically supervised injecting facility: a qualitative study," *Drug & Alcohol Dependence*, 98, no. 1-2 (2008):159-62; and Allison Salmon et al., "Injecting-related injury and disease among clients of a supervised injecting facility," *Drug & Alcohol Dependence* 101, no. 1-2 (2009):132-6.

¹⁶ Brandon D.L. Marshall et al., "Reduction in overdose mortality after the opening of North America's first medically supervised safer injecting facility: a retrospective population-based study," *Lancet* 377 (2011): 1429–37; Hedrich et al. 2010; M.J.S. Milloy et al., "Estimated Drug Overdose Deaths Averted by North America's First Medically-Supervised Safer Injection Facility," *PLoS ONE* 3 (2008):10; Thomas Kerr et al., "Drug-related overdoses with a medically supervised safer injection facility," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 17 (2006): 436–441. See also M.J.S. Milloy et al., "Non-fatal overdose among a cohort of active injection drug users recruited from a supervised injection facility," *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* 34 (2008): 499–509.

¹⁷ Allison Salmon et al., "The impact of a supervised injecting facility on ambulance call-outs in Sydney, Australia," *Addiction* 105, no. 4 (2010):676-83.

¹⁸ Martin A. Andresen & Neil Boyd, "A Cost-Benefit and Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Vancouver's Safe Injection Facility," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 21, no. 1 (2010): 70–76; Ahmed M. Bayoumi and Gregory S. Zaric, "The cost-effectiveness of Vancouver's supervised injection facility," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 179 (2008): 1143–

1151; and Steven D. Pinkerton, "Is Vancouver Canada's supervised injection facility costsaving?" *Addiction* 105, no. 8 (2010): 1429–1436.

¹⁹ Wood et al., "Safer Injecting Education for HIV Prevention Within a Medically Supervised Safer Injecting Facility," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 16 (2005):281-4; Stoltz et al. 2007; Danya Fast et al., "The perspectives of injection drug users regarding safer injecting education delivered through a supervised injecting facility," *Harm Reduction Journal* 29 (2008): 5:32.

²⁰ Thomas Kerr et al., "Impact of a medically supervised safer injection facility on community drug use patterns: a before and after study," *British Medical Journal* 332 (2006):220-222; and Semaan et al.

²¹ Thomas Kerr et al., "Circumstances of first injection among illicit drug users accessing a medically supervised safer injection facility," *American Journal of Public Health* 97 (2007):1228-30; and Semaan et al.

²² DeBeck et al., *Drug & Alcohol Dependence* (2011):175-6.

²³ Evan Wood et al., "Impact of a medically supervised safer injecting facility on drug dealing and other drug-related crime," *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 13 (2006); Freeman K, et al., "The impact of the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) on crime," *Drug and Alcohol Review* 24, no. 2 (2005): 173-184.

²⁴ Semaan et al. 100; and Will Small et al., "Access to health and social services for IDU: The impact of a medically supervised injection facility," *Drug and Alcohol Review* 28 (2009): 341–346.

²⁵ See, for example, British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, *Findings from the Evaluation of Vancouver's Pilot Medically Supervised Safer Injection Facility – Insite* (June 2009),

http://uhri.cfenet.ubc.ca/images/Documents/insite_report-eng.pdf; and Semaan et al.

²⁶ KPMG, *Further evaluation of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre 2007-2011*.

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/mhdao/pdf/msic_kpmg.pdf; see also Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre website, Background and evaluation – Independent evaluation of the MSIC, <http://www.sydneymsic.com/background-and-evaluation#Independent-evaluation>; Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (2011), Fact Sheet, <http://www.sydneymsic.com/images/resources/images/factsheetoct2011.pdf>; Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (2011), Report to New South Wales Health; SAHA International Limited (2008), Final report: Economic evaluation of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre at Kings Cross (MSIC) (SAHA: Sydney), http://www.druginfo.nsw.gov.au/data/page/1189/MSIC_Final_Report_26-9-08.pdf.

²⁷ Hedrich et al (2010); and Hedrich et al, 2004.

²⁸ Kate Dolan et al., "Drug consumption facilities in Europe and the establishment of supervised injecting centres in Australia," *Drug and Alcohol Review* 19:337-46, 2000.

²⁹ Jo Kimber et al., Nat'l Drug & Alcohol Research Ctr. Univ. of N.S.W., *International Survey of Supervised Injecting Centres (1999–2000)* (2001); Jo Kimber et al., "Drug Consumption Facilities: An Update Since 2000," 22 *Drug & Alcohol Rev.* 227 (2003).

³⁰ Mark Tyndall et al., "Attendance, drug use patterns, and referrals made from North America's first supervised injection facility," *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 83, no. 3 (2006):193-8.

³¹ Wood et al., *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2004); Freeman et al. 173; MSIC Evaluation Committee, *Final Report of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre*, Sydney, Australia. 2003.

³² Evan Wood et al. *Addiction* (2007).

³³ Dan Small, "Fools Rush in Where Angels Fear to Tread: Playing God with Vancouver's Supervised Injection Facility in the Political Borderland," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 18 (2007): 24; Andresen and Boyd; Bayoumi and Zaric; and Pinkerton.

³⁴ Andresen M and Boyd N.

³⁵ Canada (Attorney General) v. PHS Community Services Society, 2011 SCC 44, online:

<http://scc.lexum.org/en/2011/2011scc44/2011scc44.html>.

³⁶ Marshall et al. *Lancet* (2011).

³⁷ Petrar et al.

³⁸ Evan Wood et al., *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2006).

³⁹ 50th Legislature, State of New Mexico, Second Session, 2012, [Senate Memorial 45](#).

⁴⁰ Alex H. Kral et al., "Acceptability of a Safer Injection Facility among Injection Drug Users in San Francisco," *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 110 (2010): 160–163; Lynn D. Wenger, Sonya G. Arreola, and Alex H. Kral, "The prospect of implementing a Safer Injection Facility in San Francisco: Perspectives of community stakeholders," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 22, no. 3 (2011): 239-241.