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Mayor Maire

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April 1st 2019

Honourable Christine Elliott, M.P.P.,
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
777 Bay St, College Park 5th Flr
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Elliott,

The decision by your Ministry that ongoing operating funds will not be provided for the Consumption and Treatment Services site operated by Ottawa Public Health (OPH), at 179 Clarence Street, is a matter of great concern. In the face of an ongoing substance use crisis in Ottawa, and across the province, we suggest that this is a time that provincial support for this service should be expanded, not reduced.

For over 20 years, OPH has served and provided leadership in the community of Ottawa by reducing the risk of infectious diseases and deaths through provision of harm reduction services and coordination across agencies. Through a needle distribution and retrieval program at 179 Clarence St.; a mobile van that travels throughout our city; and, through operation of a consumption and treatment site, OPH has been a pioneer in delivering services to prevent the transmission of HIV, hepatitis C and other associated diseases, link people to social and health services, in short, saving lives among people who use drugs and protecting the community.

The consumption and treatment service at 179 Clarence St. has been operational since September 2017. Over that period, this one site alone has received 14,731 visits during which drugs were consumed; served 513 unique clients; overseen 202 visits where a client required enhanced monitoring; managed 132 overdoses within the CTS and immediate surroundings; and, reduced the burden of clients transported to a hospital emergency department by 121. Using average costs for paramedic transport and emergency room visits, the actions of the OPH team have saved \$135,000, not including police and fire service response calls, through service avoidance alone. The lifetime savings from preventing a single case of HIV are also significant, nearly \$300,000, so the service provides value for money. Furthermore, the value of supporting someone to end problematic substance use is invaluable.

At the same time, and consistent with current government objectives and policy, OPH employees at 179 Clarence have made: 70 addictions services referrals; 91 social services referrals; and, 148 health services referrals. The OPH consumption and treatment site has been providing the residents of Ottawa with exactly the type of programming that your government has envisioned and has continued to add on more comprehensive services, such as social work and capacity to start prescribed opioid agonist therapy on site.



The demand for these comprehensive services continues to grow as the risk of death due to fentanyl overdose continues each day. Accordingly, in addition to operating a consumption and treatment site, OPH has supported other health organizations to add to their programs and services to provide supervised consumption services connected to primary care, managed opioid programs and the social supports needed to save lives and address some of the challenges of people most in need in our community.

OPH also plays critical roles in the prevention of substance use, promoting an expansion of the harm reduction approach across all treatment agencies, and in fostering connections between organizations for more integrated mental health and substance use treatment options that put the needs of the clients first. By way of example, OPH recently partnered with The Royal to host an opioids overdose summit, which included more than 200 stakeholders and people with lived experience, to prioritize ideas and actions for a collective comprehensive approach to reduce the risk of opioid overdose in Ottawa.

While we understand that the 179 Clarence Street site is only 293 metres from the site operated by Ottawa Inner City Health (OICH) on Murray St, that is the nature of the vulnerable population in our city. It is important to consider that the clients of these two services have not been interchangeable. Those who are served by 179 Clarence St. go there by choice, as many have preferred not to attend other nearby services, and vice versa. Furthermore, both the OPH site and the OICH site have operated at capacity since they have been in operation. This proves that not only is there is a demand, but there is a requirement for these consumption and treatment services in the City of Ottawa.

Accordingly, we are requesting that you review the Ottawa Public Health application to continue to operate the 179 Clarence St. site, and overturn the decision to immediately terminate funding to this vital service in the City of Ottawa.

Sincerely,

Jim Watson
Mayor
City of Ottawa

Councillor Keith Egli
Chair of the Ottawa Board of Health
City of Ottawa