

Supervised Injection Services in Montréal

CIUSSS du Centre-Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal asks Health Canada for an exemption to implement the service

4 June 2015 — The CIUSSS du Centre-Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal's president and CEO, Sonia Bélanger, and the regional director of public health, Richard Massé, have submitted a request for an exemption to Health Canada, as per section 56 of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, in order to implement supervised injection services (SIS) in Montréal. SIS are clean and safe environments where injection drug users (IDU) can legally inject drugs they bring in themselves, under the supervision of qualified staff. "Supervised injection services are an effective response to complex human and social problems", underlined Sonia Bélanger.

According to Dr. Massé, the Montréal SIS project is the fruit of a collaboration involving partners from the health, community and municipal sectors, and meets the standards determined by Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec. The request for an exemption is the result of a meticulous process to define a regulatory structure for these services that conforms with the requirements set out by professional orders, Montréal's police department (SPVM) and emergency services. It also meets the criteria determined by the Supreme Court of Canada in their ruling on *Insite*. When developing the SIS project, the needs of injection drug users were taken into consideration, as were the concerns of citizens, elected officials and decision makers consulted.

Montréal's SIS model—three fixed sites and a mobile unit—is based on integrating a nurse within the community groups who already work with injection drug users: *CACTUS Montréal*, *Dopamine*, *Spectre de rue* and *l'Anonyme*. With over 75,000 visits a year, it is clear that injection drug users have trust in the services offered by these groups.

"The most marginalized IDU live in the streets in extremely precarious conditions and are part of the urban fabric", says Montréal mayor Denis Coderre. "Reaching out to these people and providing them with health services to which they are entitled is a challenge we must address. This is why the City of Montréal has added SIS to its 2014–2017 action plan on homelessness. I'm convinced that this initiative will improve quality of life in the neighbourhoods. It promotes better cohabitation in public places by reducing injection in public places and syringes left behind, as well as 911 calls made by citizens worried about these problems."

"Supervised injection services are an effective way to prevent overdose deaths, reduce HIV and HCV infections, and direct IDU to adapted care services. We need to act now. All partners supporting this project expect Health Canada to quickly provide a positive response to our request for an exemption", concluded Dr. Massé.

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Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux
du Centre-Est-de-l'île-de-Montréal

Information: Deborah Bonney, Information Officer
Direction régional de santé publique
514-528-2400, ext. 3596

Monique Guay, Deputy CEO, Public Affairs
514 762-2777, ext. 53291