



Social Development Centre
— WATERLOO REGION —

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE
WATERLOO REGION**

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Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE WATERLOO REGION STANDS IN SOLIDARITY WITH DRUG USE ADVOCATES WHO ARE ASKING THE PROVINCE TO KEEP CONSUMPTION AND TREATMENT SERVICES (CTS) SITES OPEN ACROSS ONTARIO

The Ford government's decision to close CTS sites is anti-science, anti-evidence, and yet another way to limit the healthcare options available to Ontarians

Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDC) is deeply concerned about the provincial government's decision to close 10 Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) sites in Ontario, including the CTS located at Sanguen Health Centre in downtown Kitchener.

The CTS at Sanguen sits across the street from our office at SDC. And every day, we are grateful for the life-saving work that happens inside. Since opening its doors in 2019, staff and peer workers at the CTS have reversed every one of the 1,031 overdoses that took place on site. That's 1,031 overdoses that didn't result in death.

While abstinence and treatment may be the alternatives being touted by our conservative government, the reality is, for some drug users neither of these is a viable

option. That means harm reduction services like CTS sites play an important role in keeping people safe and alive. For some drug users, the support and connections they receive at a CTS site can also increase the likelihood of accessing other services, including counselling, housing, and even drug treatment, over time. People with lived experience have always known this. And the research confirms this. So the question we all need to be asking is, how and why did the Ford government arrive at the decision to defund harm reduction services? It is anti-science, anti-evidence, and yet another way to limit the healthcare options available to Ontarians.

Julian Ichim and Donald Lacasse are members of SDC's lived expertise consultancy and have been fighting for safe injection sites with the Alan Ryan People's Community Defense Brigade since 2014. Ichim says, "the safe consumption sites in Kitchener were started in tents by concerned citizens. The creation of a safe consumption site has given people a safe place where they can use and access health services. If they close, we are not afraid to go back into tents to keep our communities alive."

Lacasse says, "the CTS is just one part of a system of supports. One thing on its own doesn't work. It needs counseling, addiction services, and safe supply. With the proper supports, we would be able to save and help a lot more. Our goal when we had the tent was to provide a safe supply. That way, people are using clean drugs and not street drugs. With a safe supply, you can almost eliminate the actions people take out of necessity that aren't safe (like survival sex work, theft, robberies, gang violence, etc). Whatever money they have, they are spending on the addiction, but that leaves no money for rent and food, so they have to take difficult actions."

Ichim continues, "we want to take drugs out of the hands of dealers and treat the drug problem as a health issue. By closing down the safe injection sites and rejecting safe supply, the Ford government is promoting criminality and keeping drugs in the hands of dealers who only care about profit and not people's lives."

Lacasse adds, "I am worried that this is a process of elimination. They did this when they first came to this land. By eliminating us, they can start over. They can erase us and rewrite history again."

SDC stands in solidarity with all those who are asking Premier Ford and Health Minister Jones to keep CTS sites open across Ontario. We implore the province to work with health partners and communities on the ground to implement strategies that truly increase safety for us all. And we encourage everyone in our networks to support grassroots organizers at a peaceful rally this Wednesday, August 28 - let's bring greater awareness and urgency to the need for an adequately resourced, evidence-based emergency drug strategy in Waterloo Region:

What: Overdoses Action Day - Mourn the Past, Change the Future (flyer attached)

When: Wednesday, August 28, 2024 (5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.)

Where: 150 Frederick St., Kitchener

Who: This rally for change is being organized by the Waterloo Region Drug Action Team, an unfunded, volunteer-driven team of Waterloo Region residents with interest, experience, and expertise in resolving a wide range of drug-related issues.

About Social Development Centre Waterloo Region

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDC) was incorporated in 1967 as part of the Social Planning movement. Over the years we have incubated countless community projects, grassroots groups, and sibling non-profits. Today our primary pillars are Housing & Homelessness, Grassroots Infrastructure, and Lived Expertise. Our programs include Eviction Prevention, CivicHub Waterloo Region, Lived Expertise Consultancy, and Festival of Neighbourhoods. Learn about our work at www.waterlooregion.org.

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