



Safe Consumption is a Labour Issue: Workers Call for the Reversal of Deadly SCS Closures in Ontario

We, the undersigned labour unions, representing hundreds of thousands of workers across Ontario, call on Premier Ford and Minister Jones to immediately reverse their deadly decision to force the closure of 10 supervised consumption services (SCS). We call on the Ontario government to support and fund evidence-based health care services that save lives, amidst a public health emergency.

As workers in many different sectors and communities across Ontario, we are all impacted by the devastation of the toxic drug crisis: whether through experiencing the personal loss of a loved one, or the distress and pressure that affect communities due to ongoing poor management of this crisis. Rather than pouring fuel on the fire through devastating cuts, the Ontario government must immediately support and scale up SCS across the province as a necessary emergency response.

Shutting down SCS means more 911 calls to our paramedics, firefighters, and police that could have been diverted. It means more patients and longer wait times in our overrun emergency departments. It means more overdoses at our job sites, public parks, community centers, and library bathrooms, where all workers must regularly respond to critical health emergencies.

Every day in Ontario, [10 people](#) die due to the toxic unregulated drug supply. More than 21,000 people have died since the Ford government was elected in 2018, causing immeasurable grief, loss, and distress. Without access to SCS and other harm reduction measures at scale, toxic drug deaths will soar.

We need to value evidence and facts over ideology and opinion when making public policy – there are four decades of evidence proving that SCS and safe needle distribution programs work. Public health guidelines, including the Chief Medical Health Officer's [annual report](#) and the provincial government's own [expert-appointed review](#) call for the expansion of SCS.

SCS support people in stabilizing their lives and accessing care; providing connections to primary healthcare, detox and addictions medicine; administering vaccines; performing wound care; testing and care for HIV and Hepatitis C. SCS in Ontario have provided over [half a million referrals](#) to health and social supports. For every dollar spent on SCS, more than [five dollars](#) in future healthcare costs are saved.

The Ford government has actively worsened the health and safety of workers in Ontario with respect to the toxic drug crisis by closing 10 of 17 sites and preventing any new SCS from opening or existing services from relocating.

The announced SCS closures are particularly devastating for Northern Ontario communities, where the opioid mortality rate is [three times higher](#) than the south. The sole remaining SCS in

Northern Ontario – where [80% of First Nations communities are located](#) – is now slated for closure in Thunder Bay, where the opioid mortality rate is [4.25 times greater](#) than the provincial average. The Ford government has refused to fund SCS in Timmins and Sudbury, where sites were already established and running after years of community investment and labour – forcing these two sites, and a third one in Windsor, to shut down. Should the Ford government’s decision carry forward, there will be no SCS between Ottawa and Winnipeg.

It shouldn’t matter who you are or where you live – all people in Ontario deserve access to lifesaving care and supports.

We reject the false narrative that it is “unsafe” to have SCS in proximity to schools and childcare centres – **SCS keep our streets safer, bring drug use indoors, and create a place to build community.** The reality is that people who use drugs are part of our communities and deserve healthcare services. In dense urban environments, it is inaccessible, stigmatizing, and wholly unfeasible to require two football fields of separation between a school or daycare and a healthcare facility, such as a SCS.

On Aug 22 2024, Minister Jones [asserted](#) that “people are not going to die” as a result of SCS closures. SCS in Ontario have responded to [nearly 22,000 overdoses without a single death](#) due to the dedication, care and resourcing of trained, skilled workers. **Minister Jones and Premier Ford, people will die as a result of your proposal. The government’s announced HART Hubs are not an adequate or analogous replacement for SCS, with conditional funding that bans evidence-based health services.**

Premier Ford and Minister Jones must immediately reverse the decision to close 10 of the 17 SCS in Ontario, ensure all established SCS remain operational, scale up SCS wherever there is need, and ensure equity in regional service availability, particularly in northern communities.

We call on the Ontario Government to do the sensible thing: support and expand lifesaving health services, rather than closing them.

Signed,

CUPE Local 79
CUPE Local 4948
CUPE Local 5399
CUPE Local 7797
CUPE Ontario
Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL)
Ontario Nurses Association (ONA)
Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU)
Ontario Library Workers Committee (OLW)

Ontario Municipal Workers Committee (OMW)
Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU)
OPSEU/SEFPO
OPSEU/SEFPO Locals 744
OPSEU/SEFPO Local 5115
Social Service Workers Coordinating Committee (SSWCC)
UFCW Locals 175 & 633