

# STUDENT RESEARCH WEEK

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## **Supervised Consumption Sites in Alberta Urban Centres: Investigating the Legal and Social Barriers to Implementation**

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### **Abstract**

Drug use and its associated health risks represent a growing public health crisis for Canadians. Many of these associated health risks, such as overdose and exposure to bloodborne diseases, are highly preventable (Butler & Phillips, 2015; Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, 2013). Harm reduction services have been proposed as a strategy for consideration as part of a comprehensive approach to Canadian drug policy. The goal of harm reduction is to reduce the adverse effects of drug use without necessarily reducing drug use itself (Harm Reduction International, 2015). One example is the implementation of supervised consumption sites, which provide drug users with a safe place to consume pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of trained health care professionals (Elliot, Malkin, & Gold, 2002; Health Canada, 2008). Canada has one supervised consumption site (Insite) currently in operation, located in Vancouver, BC (Butler & Phillips, 2015; Vancouver Coastal Health, n.d.). Despite the agency's success, potential new supervised consumption sites in cities such as Montréal, QC, have faced substantial resistance (Direction Régionale de Santé Publique, 2015; Lessard & Morissette, 2011; Lowrie, 2014). The goal of this research was to investigate the legal and social barriers to the implementation of supervised consumption sites in Alberta urban centres. A literature search was conducted with support from the Alberta Health's research services unit. Two primary legal barriers were identified: the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and Bill C-2, the Respect for Communities Act (Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, 1996; Bill C-2, 2015). An associated court case, *Canada (Attorney General) v. PHS Community Services Society*, discussed challenges to Insite's continued operation (*Canada (Attorney General) v. PHS Community Services Society*, 2011). The importance of public perception

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was highlighted as a significant social barrier in several of the reviewed texts (Bell & Globerman, 2014; Eggertson, 2013; Eggertson, 2015; Hanon, 2015; Hyshka, Bubela, & Wild, 2013). The current Canadian and Albertan contexts provide an opportunity to examine the benefits and challenges regarding the implementation of supervised consumption sites in Alberta urban centres. These findings have been summarized in a white paper and submitted to Alberta Health's Addictions and Mental Health Branch as background information for the consideration of policy development to advance the implementation of supervised consumption sites in Alberta urban centres.

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