

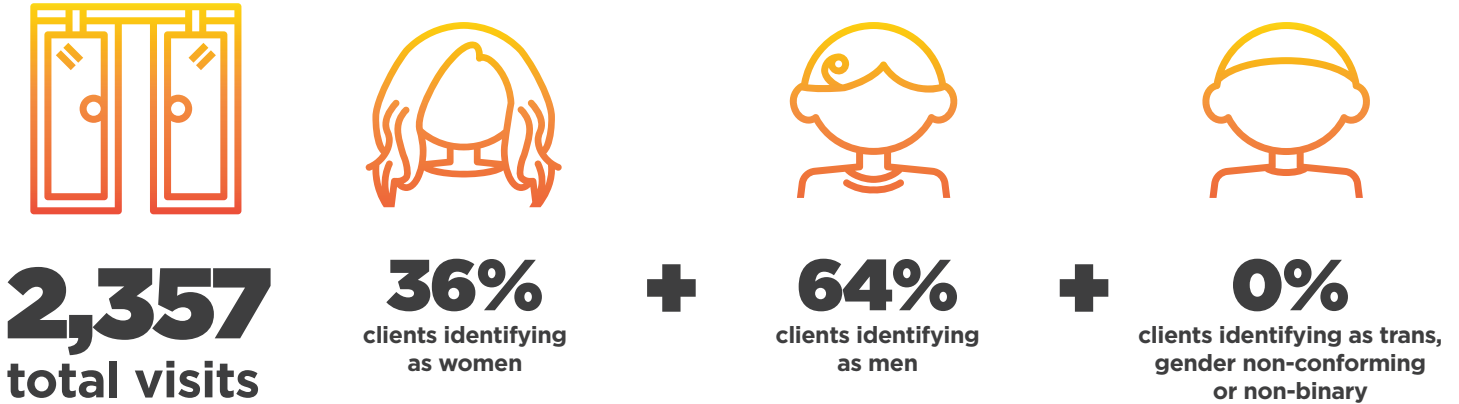


## ST. STEPHEN'S COMMUNITY HOUSE OVERDOSE PREVENTION SITE: EVALUATION RESULTS

St. Stephen's Community House (SSCH) is a community-based social service agency that has been serving the Kensington Market area adjacent to downtown Toronto since 1962. This neighbourhood had the fifth highest number of overdose calls in the entire city of Toronto between January 2018 and June 2019. St. Stephen's Urban Health and Homeless Service focuses on the provision of comprehensive, integrated services for individuals living with complex issues, including substance use, mental health issues, homelessness, poverty and isolation.

On April 25, 2018, St. Stephen's opened a small overdose prevention site (OPS) with 2 injection spaces off the main drop-in space in the basement. In June 2019, the OPS moved upstairs to a larger room and added a third injection space. The objective of the OPS is to provide a safe space for people to use drugs under supervision, with trained staff able to respond to overdoses, provide support, safer drug use education and supplies, and to connect people to additional healthcare and social services as needed.

### PROGRAM USAGE STATISTICS



Number of overdoses successfully reversed: **17**

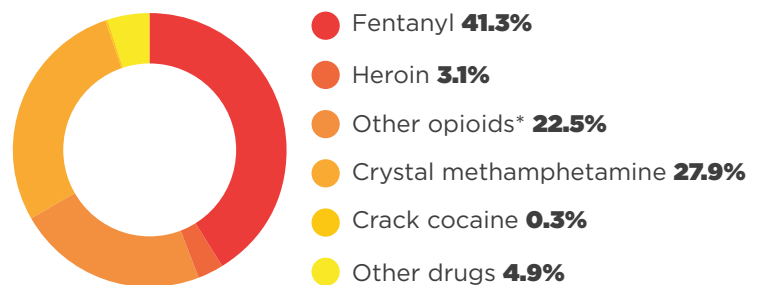
Average number of visits per month:<sup>1</sup> **154**

Average number of referrals per month to healthcare including substance treatment:<sup>2</sup> **37**

Average age of clients: **37 years old**

Peer-to-peer assisted injections: **8.1%**

### PRIMARY DRUG CONSUMED



\* oxycodone, hydromorphone, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Average number of visits per month from January – August 2019

<sup>2</sup> Average number of referrals per month from April – August 2019

## Health and social impacts of the overdose prevention site:

St. Stephen's OPS has led to several positive health and social impacts for OPS clients, including:

- **Reduced overdose-related harms:** Staff intervene to reverse overdoses, preventing death and harm.  
*"We've had lots of overdoses here, but they haven't been big crises, because the staff are calm and confident. It's really just been easy. It's been a simple, nice addition. It's been quite amazing."* (SSCH OPS STAFF)
- **Encouraging safer drug use:** Clients using the OPS can consume drugs slowly, and use sterile equipment and safer consumption practices.  
*"It gives me a safe place to use and not have to do it in a washroom"* (SSCH OPS CLIENT)
- **Increased engagement in wrap-around care:** Provision of OPS services facilitates clients' access to other healthcare and social services, on-site or through referrals to community partners.  
*"If you come in here and you're struggling you have somebody to talk to. If you want to seek out treatment they have programs for that. If you need housing you can get housing. If you need a meal you can get something to eat."* (SSCH OPS CLIENT)

## Potential impacts of OPS closure

When asked about the impacts of OPS closure, clients reported the following potential outcomes:

- **Increased drug use in public spaces:**  
*"They're going to go back to doing what they did before, they're gonna use in the washrooms or in the alleyways, which opens up more chances of overdosing and dying."* (SSCH OPS STAFF)
- **Increased risk of overdose and related harms, including death**  
*"I wouldn't have a safe place to use and I could overdose."* (SSCH OPS CLIENT)

Staff reported that they worried about the following outcomes:

- **That clients would lose safe space with a supportive community**  
*"I think it would feel like a rejection for our clients. I think it could potentially lead to people taking more risks."* (SSCH MANAGEMENT)
- **Loss of jobs and income for people working in the OPS**  
*"I know that our staff are very committed and invested in the site, so I think it would be pretty devastating for them."* (SSCH MANAGEMENT)

Potential impacts for the community if the OPS were to close:

- **Increased public drug use and increased overdoses in public spaces**  
*"The community's terrified. We've had some deaths in the neighbourhood... A lot of our clients go into the businesses around here, and for the most part, they're welcomed, so they get to know them. They're part of the community. You don't want to put those lives at risk and lose people."* (SSCH MANAGEMENT)

## OPS Service Delivery Model and Implementation

### Location and space

- Kensington-Chinatown has the 5th highest rate of overdose calls to paramedics in the City of Toronto. The OPS is desperately needed in the neighbourhood to respond to overdoses and public drug use.
- Locating the OPS onsite facilitates client access to other healthcare and social services.
- Clients prefer the small, calm, and non-clinical environment.  
*"We have a better opportunity to connect with the people here than some of the other sites that are busier."* (SSCH MANAGEMENT)

### Accessibility

- The OPS provides low-threshold services, with short wait times and access to other services.  
*"We're very lucky in that we have a nurse four days a week, and then a doctor here one day a week, so if we have people come in who need some wound care or something, we just take them to see the nurse."* (SSCH MANAGEMENT)

### Staff with lived experience of drug use

- Having staff with lived experience of drug use enhanced OPS accessibility and increased client willingness to use the OPS and other healthcare and social services.  
*"People that haven't been there won't get it, as much as they might try to. Having people with lived experience, we can connect with the client, in a way that maybe other people won't be able to."* (SSCH OPS STAFF)

### OPS provides a refuge

- The OPS provided a welcoming space for people who are homeless.
- A large proportion of OPS clients inject stimulants. St. Stephen's has developed innovative programming with this underserved population group.  
*"We've done a lot of work recently, around crystal meth use. We had a pilot project for crystal meth users to have access to dedicated case management...there's opportunity here for people who use crystal meth, to engage further than just using the OPS."* (SSCH MANAGEMENT)

### Community support for an OPS in the neighbourhood

- Neighbours, businesses, and the community school in Kensington Market embraced the opening of an OPS at St. Stephen's.  
*"The community loves us, they love our site...they're concerned about people using in their washrooms and in the alleys and discarded supplies, so they've been really happy to have the site."* (SSCH MANAGEMENT)

## Challenges:

### Lack of shelter beds or treatment/detox space

- OPS staff reported frustrations with securing shelter beds and detox beds. They would frequently spend many hours trying to find available beds for clients.  
*"There's just generally not enough services for people that are homeless. We get a lot of spill-over from services that could or should be providing other things, that we're not able to provide, but we try to fill in those gaps."* (SSCH OPS STAFF)

### Lack of smoking facilities

- Lack of supervised spaces for people to smoke drugs is a health equity issue.
- Smoking is a common mode of consumption of opioids and stimulants, and the OPS are currently not able to accommodate this.  
*"We can't keep them safe, from the law, from overdose, when they want to smoke. Lots of people are like, 'I want to stop injecting and I want to smoke.' And it's impossible to help with that, when we can't offer a space."* (SSCH MANAGEMENT)

### Funding insecurity

- The uncertainty around long-term funding is the primary challenge faced by St. Stephen's.
- Balancing service delivery with the considerable time and human resource demands dedicated to securing funding and developing contingency plans for if the site were to close has been difficult.