

Également disponible en français

BLOCKING HEALTH SERVICES UNCONSCIONABLE
As Bill C-2 comes up for a final vote in the House of Commons,
organizations across Canada voice their support for
life-saving supervised consumption services for people who use drugs

March 23, 2015 — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network is releasing [a statement](#) on behalf of 120 Canadian civil society organizations, to protest Bill C-2, which is expected to receive third reading and be put to a final vote in the House of Commons today.

If it becomes law, Bill C-2 — the so-called *Respect for Communities Act* — will disregard scientific evidence and seriously undermine health, human rights, and the well-being of our communities. It will do so by imposing an excessive and unreasonable process for health authorities and community agencies looking to open, or maintain, desperately-needed supervised consumption services for people who use drugs — services that the Supreme Court of Canada has already determined save lives.

“This is a profoundly misguided and damaging piece of legislation,” said Richard Elliott, executive director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. “In creating thoroughly unnecessary and unwarranted barriers to operating such health services, Bill C-2 willfully ignores the overwhelming scientific evidence about the effectiveness of supervised consumption services, such as Vancouver’s Insite. Bill C-2 also exacerbates the harms suffered by some of the most marginalized members of our communities living with drug dependence.”

Some 120 organizations from across Canada — organizations working on the frontlines of HIV, harm reduction, health care and human rights — have endorsed today’s statement, which aims to cut through the stigma and discrimination that too often characterize discussions of drug policy issues, and restore reason and evidence to public policy decisions.

According to the statement, “supervised consumption services are health services providing a safe, hygienic environment where people can use pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of trained staff.” These facilities have been shown, in Canada and in numerous other countries, “to reduce the risks of transmission of infectious diseases and overdose-related deaths.” Furthermore, they “improve access to health, treatment and social services for the most marginalized groups and contribute to the safety and quality of life of local communities by reducing the impact of open drug scenes.” A wide range of health experts and agencies across Canada support the implementation of such services.

In 2011, the Supreme Court of Canada ordered the government to continue an exemption allowing Insite to operate without risk of criminal prosecution under Canada’s drug laws. The Court ruled that, where the evidence indicates such a service will reduce the risk of death and disease, and where there is little or no evidence that it will have a negative impact on public

safety, the federal government “should generally grant an exemption.” To unjustifiably deny such an exemption, is to violate human rights protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Yet Bill C-2 would not only create multiple practical hurdles to even completing an application for an exemption, it also instructs the federal Health Minister that any exemption should only be granted in “exceptional circumstances.”

True respect for communities would make access to health easier for all, instead of harder. The endorsers of the statement call on Canada’s Members of Parliament to overlook ideology and acknowledge evidence, by voting against Bill C-2. Should the bill pass in the House today, it will then be up to the Senate to ensure sober second thought and examine the bill in detail, including full hearings from expert witnesses.

To read the full statement, visit bit.ly/BillC2statement.

To read more on why Bill C-2 is contrary to the letter and spirit of the Supreme Court of Canada’s 2011 decision in the *Insite* case, visit [An Injection of Reason – Critical Analysis of Bill C-2](#).

– 30 –

Contact:

Lauryn Kronick
Communications and Outreach Officer
Telephone: +1 416 595-1666 ext. 236
Email: lkronick@aidslaw.ca