

February 4, 2021

City of Kawartha Lakes Council  
c/o Jane Pyle, Executive Assistant to the Chief Administrative Officer (via email [jpyle@kawarthalakes.ca](mailto:jpyle@kawarthalakes.ca))  
26 Francis Street, P.O. Box 9000  
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Dear Members of Council for the City of Kawartha Lakes,

At your meeting held on February 2, 2021, some questions were asked by some councillors about the Needle Exchange Program during my presentation on the budget for HKPRDHU for 2021. To answer these questions, we are enclosing a summary of the programme, including the background, history, purpose and processes of the programme. We hope that it provides you with additional information that you may not have had an opportunity to seek during our brief time at your meeting. I should mention that, as a result of the questions at the Council's meeting, there also have been enquiries from the media, who have been provided with the same information.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [igemmill@hkpr.on.ca](mailto:igemmill@hkpr.on.ca) or my assistant, Elizabeth Dickson, at [edickson@hkpr.on.ca](mailto:edickson@hkpr.on.ca).

With kind regards



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Attachment

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## Media Inquiry – Needle Exchange Program in CKL

- The presentation made on Tuesday (Feb. 3) to City of Kawartha Lakes council related to the 2021 budget request from the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit (HKPRDHU). The presentation included examples of provincially-mandated programs that HKPRDHU must provide in the City of Kawartha Lakes, Haliburton County and Northumberland County. One of these programs is the Needle Exchange Program (NEP), which is mandated in the *Ontario Public Health Standards*.

### History of the Needle Exchange Program

- The NEP is not a new initiative in the region, as it has been offered in some form in the City of Kawartha Lakes for more than two decades. Currently, there is no plan to expand the existing needle exchange program in CKL to include a safe consumption site. COVID-19 has emphasized the need to ‘meet people where they are’ and through HKPRDHU’s partnership with other agencies – including the Peterborough AIDS Resource Network (PARN), Green Wood Coalition and the John Howard Society – our efforts have been enhanced to meet these needs. Peer networks of those who use the program have also been providing informal outreach to people facing barriers to access during the pandemic.
- The development of the local Needle Exchange Program dates back to 1997, when PARN and Trent University completed a research project entitled “*Developing a Response to the Emerging HIV Crisis.*” This research was specifically focused on creating a rural response to HIV infection as it related to injection drug use in the four counties of Peterborough, Victoria (now Kawartha Lakes), Northumberland and Haliburton. As a result, the Four Counties Needle Exchange Coalition was formed and operated between 1998 – 2007. Partner agencies involved in this coalition included PARN, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Women’s Health Care Centre (Peterborough Regional Health Centre), Elizabeth Fry Society, Four Counties Addiction Services Team, and the Peterborough County-City Health Unit. These agencies provided in-kind staffing hours and resources to ensure the effectiveness of this program.
- In 2006, the provincial government created the Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program (OHRDP). It mandates public health units – like HKPRDHU – to deliver needle exchange programs and provide the necessary equipment to prevent the spread of bloodborne infections such as HIV and Hepatitis C.

### How the Needle Exchange Program Works

- In the HKPR Health Unit region, the NEP is known as *Harm Reduction Works*. HKPRDHU delivers it in partnership with PARN. *Harm Reduction Works* aims to reduce the spread of bloodborne pathogens by providing a multi-site program that:
  - Supplies clean needles and other harm reduction equipment.
  - Provides safe disposal of used needles.
- *Harm Reduction Works* also provides education to clients about the safe use and disposal of needles and equipment, and provides referrals for treatment and health care.
- Each year, the local NEP reports more than 2,700 client interactions in the tri-county area (Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes and Northumberland).
- In 2019, the rate of needle returns (the number of needles going out versus the number of needles being returned) was 82 per cent in the HKPRDHU region. Currently, HKPRDHU does not have complete data for 2020, but expects that, due to agency closures during COVID-19, the rate of return will be affected.

- In City of Kawartha Lakes, the following sites operate as NEP locations:
  - Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit offices
  - OATC Lindsay
  - FourCAST
  - Remedy's RX on Kent
  - Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
  - PARN (through its outreach program)

### **Harm Reduction – What it is, Why It Matters and How It Pays Off**

- The NEP in City of Kawartha Lakes is an example of a *harm reduction program*. Harm reduction programs are shown to be effective because they help to reduce the risk of more serious problems. Simple examples of harm reduction include: buckling up with a seatbelt, wearing a bike helmet, or putting on sunscreen to protect against sunburn.
- Harm reduction programs are part of a comprehensive approach (along with treatment, counselling, and support) to address substance use. It is an investment in saving health care and treatment costs over the long-run and in preventing the spread of serious diseases like HIV and Hepatitis B and C that can occur with sharing or reuse of equipment used to inject or to inhale drugs. It is a much safer and cost-effective option than people who use drugs putting themselves and others at risk by reusing equipment.
- Harm Reduction is part of an Ontario HIV strategy that has saved the Province a considerable amount in health care costs over the years. A [study from the Ontario HIV Treatment Network](#) determined that:
  - Each dollar invested in HIV prevention saves \$5 from being spent in the health care system
  - Between 1987 and 2011, 16,672 cases of HIV were averted, for an estimated saving of up to \$6.5 billion.
- Put another way, the cost of a full Harm Reduction Kit in Canada is around \$1 ([Source; Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse](#)). The average cost of treating someone living with HIV over their lifetime can be in the tens of thousands of dollars.

### **NEP and Harm Reduction Efforts Protect Public Health**

- The philosophy behind NEPs is that providing clean needles, and other equipment, to people who use drugs does not enable or encourage drug use. Instead, it protects public health by reducing the transmission of these blood-borne infections. People who use the needle exchange program can be protected from the spread of serious diseases, while also having an opportunity to engage with health services in an understanding, non-judgmental way. Anyone can use or become addicted to drugs, regardless of job, income, education, social status, etc. Instead of stigmatizing people who use substances, supporting them through effective harm-reduction effort may lead to recovery, which is the most important goal of this approach.

- Providing clean needles and equipment through an NEP also allows service providers to connect with at-risk individuals. Health-care providers, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, or harm reduction workers, can share treatment options, make referrals to other support services such as recovery programmes, or just listen to people's problems and point them in the right direction for help. Rather than showing them the door, harm reduction programs provide openings, options, and support to reduce harm until people who use drugs are ready to take further actions, such as recovery.
- In supplying new needles and equipment through NEPs, it's also essential to provide safe and proper disposal options. This part is done by letting people return or exchange their used needles at the NEP, and outside of program hours, promoting other locales for safe disposal such as the needle disposal kiosks. It ensures that more used needles are properly disposed and do not pose a risk to area residents.