



ACT Policy Brief

Topic Title: Harm Reduction Services for People Who Inject Drugs

Published: August 2017

Reviewed: July 2023

Overview: At ACT, we are committed to the advancement of comprehensive harm reduction strategies which recognize the diverse needs of our community. We emphasize the value of safer sex initiatives, harm reduction equipment distribution, provision of a safer drug supply, and the creation of safer injection sites, alongside effective procedures for handling drug poisoning events. We acknowledge the unique goals among people who inject drugs (PWID) and understand that not all are looking to reduce or cease their drug use. As such, we advocate for flexible and tailored treatment programs. A harm reduction approach is a pivotal mechanism for lessening harm among PWID, while also combating the stigma that often creates barriers to essential healthcare services.

What's the issue and why is it important: At ACT, we are committed to the advancement of comprehensive harm reduction strategies which recognize the diverse needs of our community. We emphasize the value of safer sex initiatives, harm reduction equipment distribution, provision of a safer drug supply, and the creation of safer injection sites, alongside effective procedures for handling drug poisoning events. We acknowledge the unique goals among people who inject drugs (PWID) and understand that not all are looking to reduce or cease their drug use. As such, we advocate for flexible and tailored treatment programs. A harm reduction approach is a pivotal mechanism for lessening harm among PWID, while also combating the stigma that often creates barriers to essential healthcare services.

What do we know: The distribution of harm reduction tools and the integration of supervised injection services are powerful public health interventions that can limit the spread of HIV and hepatitis C and reduce the incidence of drug poisoning. There is growing evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of decriminalizing drug consumption and possession and introducing a safe supply of drugs. Safe supply programs have reported several positive outcomes, including increased engagement in primary care, increased engagement in HIV and Hepatitis C testing and treatment, and reduced illicit drug use and overdose risk.

What does this mean for ACT: Given this evidence, ACT remains steadfast in our support for the development of comprehensive harm reduction services. We affirm the right of PWID to non-judgmental, effective, and accessible healthcare services. Through these efforts, we strive to empower PWID and enhance the wellbeing and resilience of our community.



Toronto's Overdose Action Plan (2017) outlines 10 recommendations, two of which are related to the work of ACT; Recommendation #2: Overdose Protocols and Naloxone, and Recommendation #9: Social Factors. ACT is committed to meeting these recommendations through its policies and procedures, resources, and by training its staff.

Citations:

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7840515/>

² <https://www.catie.ca/prevention-in-focus/safe-supply-what-is-it-and-what-is-happening-in-canada>

³ <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/968f-Toronto-Overdose-Action-Plan.pdf>