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**Save Our Sites or Fill Your Morgues: Unions Release Joint Letter Urging Ford Government to Reverse Deadly Closures of Supervised Consumption Sites in Ontario**

TORONTO, ON – On Wednesday afternoon, provincial union leaders released a [**joint letter**](about:blank) calling on Premier Ford and Minister Sylvia Jones to reverse course on the announced closures of supervised consumption sites (SCSs) across Ontario, as well as the prevention of any new SCS opening or existing services relocating.

The shared appeal is endorsed by unions and labour associations collectively representing over 1 million workers provincially. Signatories include the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL); Ontario Nurses’ Association (ONA); the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU); the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OBSCU); the Ontario Public Sector Employees Union (OPSEU/SEFPO); CUPE Ontario including Library Workers and the Social Service Workers Coordinating Committee; OPSEU/SEFPO Locals 744 and 5115; UFCW Locals 175 & 633; and CUPE Locals 79, 5399, 4948, and 7797.

OFL President Laura Walton, OCHU President Michael Hurley, OPSEU/SEFPO President JP Hornick, and CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn gathered at the Ontario Legislature to sound the alarm ahead of planned legislation that aims to shutter 10 out of 17 SCSs across the province. Should the Ford government’s decision carry forward, there will be no SCSs between Ottawa and Winnipeg, and no sites left north of Ottawa.

The provincial move to restrict access to care during a public health emergency has been rightfully criticized as a deadly policy decision, but the ramifications for workers across sectors have received no attention.

Unions say that SCS closures will lead to more 911 calls to our paramedics, firefighters, and police that could have been diverted; more patients and longer wait times in our overrun emergency departments; more overdoses at our job sites, public parks, community centres, and library bathrooms, where workers must regularly respond to critical health emergencies.

Workers call on the Ontario government “to do the sensible thing” – support and expand life-saving health services, rather than closing them.

**Quotes:**

“A government’s first duty should be to save lives but Ford’s decisions relentlessly fail Ontario’s workers. Ford was more than happy to blow $225 million of public funds to cancel a contract with the Beer Store early just to push his alcohol-everywhere scheme. That’s enough money to keep 10 supervised consumption sites running for 15 years. Every dollar we spend on SCSs generates $5.12 in future healthcare savings.” - JP Hornick, President, OPSEU/SEFPO

“We’ve heard firsthand about the devastating impact of supervised consumption site closures. Skilled trades workers, who engage in physical labour and have a lack of paid sick days, have been disproportionately affected by the opioid crisis. First Nations communities, which are experiencing toxic drug deaths at four times the provincial average, will also be disproportionately impacted. If the Ford government moves forward with these closures, the sole supervised consumption site in the north – where nearly 80% of Indigenous communities in the province live – will shutter.” - Laura Walton, President, OFL

“At a time when Ontarians are facing ongoing emergency room closures and incredibly long wait times, including for ambulances, closing supervised consumption sites will not only deny Ontarians a lifesaving service that manages overdoses without need for paramedics or emergency departments, but will contribute to increased load and strain on a deeply underfunded healthcare system.”  - Michael Hurley, President, OCHU

“Libraries have always been a cornerstone of our communities, and as one of the few remaining free public spaces, they have become another frontline of the toxic drug crisis. Pushing people out of health care facilities where they can use drugs safely doesn’t solve the crisis – it just forces people to use in the streets, or bathroom stalls. I never thought that being a library worker would mean that we need to be trained to administer naloxone on the job, what are we to do while this government roles out policy decisions which abandon our neighbours?” - Brandon Haynes, President, CUPE Local 4948 (Toronto Public Library Workers Union); Co-Chair, CUPE National Library Workers' Committee

“As educators, our daily work focuses on cultivating evidence-based inquiry and critical thinking in young learners. The Ford government could learn a thing or two from our approach to early education: we have over 40 years of evidence, including the province’s own commissioned reviews, to indicate that supervised consumption sites work and should be expanded. What example does it set for youth in Ontario to see people in power make policy decisions that dismiss facts and trivialize decades of research?” - Joe Tigani, President, OSBCU

“Despite the evidence that supervised consumption sites both save lives and keep members of the community safer, this government has plowed ahead with no consultation with the nurses and others who provide these invaluable services. It’s imperative that this government revisit its decision and ensure that the thousands of Ontarians who need the emergency medical care, preventive and primary care and supports and referrals at supervised consumption sites can continue to access them. To close these sites is to sentence people to danger, and many to death.” - Erin Ariss, RN, Provincial President, Ontario Nurses’ Association (ONA)

“Ford’s Conservatives have allowed ignorance and ideology to drive their decision to close supervised consumption sites, when they should be listening to frontline workers and others who advocate for evidence-based practices and policies. To keep individuals and communities safe, we need more funding for new and existing sites, as part of a suite of services to support vulnerable, marginalized people who are at risk toxic drug death.” - Fred Hahn, President, CUPE Ontario

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