

Background

- Supervised Consumption Services (SCS) and Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) **reduce risks** of drug poisoning, HIV and hepatitis C, and support the health of people who use drugs.¹
- Despite perceptions that drug poisonings only affect large urban centres, **high rates of drug-related harms** occur in **rural and small population settings**.
- British Columbia's Northern Health Authority (a highly rural region) had **74.4 drug poisoning** deaths per 100,000 people in 2023 - the **highest rate** in the province and **1.6x greater** than Vancouver.²
- In Kenora, Ontario (pop. 15,000), the 2023 incidence rate of HIV was **58.6 cases per 100,000** compared to a **national average** of 4.7 cases per 100,000.³
- Research on SCS in Canada **is concentrated in large urban settings**; little is known about SCS in rural, remote, small population and low-resource settings.

Objectives

- Identify** and describe SCS accessibility and availability in **rural and small population settings** across Canada.
- Assess barriers and facilitators** to accessing SCS in rural and small population settings.
- Highlight potential alternative models** (e.g., mobile, virtual) to expand SCS access in underserved areas.

Methods

- Environmental scan approach**, systematically searching academic databases (ie., Pubmed, SCOPUS) and Google for English language **academic and grey literature** on SCS in rural settings published **before June 2024 (n=53)**.
- Data extracted and deductively analyzed to **identify key themes**, including SCS accessibility, barriers and facilitators in rural/small population centres, and alternative service models (e.g., mobile, virtual).

21% (n=11) Obtained via **academic literature**

79% (n=42) Obtained via **grey literature**



Findings

Scan here for a map & list of SCS/OPS in rural and small population settings across Canada



- There are few SCS in rural Canada**, with most concentrated in British Columbia (**76%, n=25**). Followed by Ontario (**12%, n=4**), Alberta (**6%, n=2**), Atlantic Canada (**3%, n=1**), and Northern Canada (**3%, n=1**).
- There is a critical gap in services** in rural Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Quebec where **no SCS** are located.

Access Barriers

- Stigma**
- Lack of privacy
- Fear of **public perception** with limited locations,
- Lack of **inhalation** services,
- Restricted **hours** of operation
- Transportation** barriers.

Service Challenges

- Few **optimal location** options in smaller communities
- Often must operate flexible SCS, ie., **tents, RV's, shipping containers** to meet need/demand.

Policy Issues

- Funding** shortage
- Regulatory** hurdles (e.g. limit on number of SCS that can operate in a single province, location requirements)
- Competing political interests**.

Responsive Service Models

- Expanding rural SCS should include **inhalation** services, staff with **lived experience**, and **diverse** backgrounds (gender, race, indigeneity) to build trust, reduce stigma, and promote **consistent use** of SCS.

- Alternative Approaches:** Formal/informal **peer-based** networks, and **mobile/virtual** services (ie., National Overdose Response Hotline, Timer-based services) can **overcome** transportation, privacy, accessibility, and policy barriers.

Conclusions

→ SCS must be **urgently scaled up** in rural and small population settings & must **meet the unique needs and preferences** of PWUD to support utilization and sustainability.

→ **More research** is needed on SCS in rural and small population settings.

- Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM)**. National Operational Guidance for the Implementation of Supervised Consumption Services. Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse; July 17, 2023. Version 1.
- British Columbia Coroners Service**. (2024). Unregulated drug deaths - Health authority of injury (Year) (up to April 30, 2024). <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiNjRhYTZhNmUtMDBmNy00YXVxLTkzMtMMDI5NmZiM2Y1MzhmliwidCI6IjZmZGhMjAwLTNkMGQeNGE4YShtMDM2LWQzNjg1ZTMiOWFkYyJ9>
- Northwestern Health Unit**. (2023). HIV Epidemiologic Survey - February 28, 2023. <https://www.nwhu.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/NWHU-HIV-Epi-Summary-Feb-28-2023.pdf>