

SOS: Safer Opioid Supply

What is safer supply?

A public health and harm-reduction approach to address opioid overdoses by providing legal and safer pharmaceutical-grade drug supply to people who use drugs (PWUD). Safer supply approaches are evidence-informed interventions, consisting of the provision of safer doses of opioid medication by primary care providers as an alternative to contaminated sources of 'street' drugs, which are increasingly unpredictable and toxic. Safer opioid supply, or SOS, aims to reduce overdose risk, prevent deaths and provide low-barrier health and social supports for PWUD.

Who is safer supply for?

For individuals with ongoing, self-reported high-risk illicit substance use, opioid-use disorder, previous unsuccessful treatments such as methadone or suboxone.

1



Enrolment & eligibility

- Primary care providers (doctor / nurse practitioner) can assess individuals to determine eligibility

2



Prescription, consumption, & monitoring

- A primary care clinician prescribes regulated opioids
- Dispensed by pharmacists. Clients may receive daily or a week supply of tablets
- Consumed on-site or off-site; clients encouraged to go to a supervised consumption site if available
- Clients initially seen daily, then weekly, or as determined

3



Low barrier access to wraparound supports

- Education about harm reduction
- Ongoing clinical assessment for dose and effects
- Access to primary care treatment on-site
- Connected to community supports (e.g. housing, counselling)



Canadian Mental
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Emerging evidence & outcomes of safer supply approaches

In Ontario, several SOS models currently exist with an increasing number of prescribers that are engaging in this approach. Often SOS programs are located within Community Health Centres, where in addition to primary care, clients can also be connected to a broad range of psychosocial supports. While evidence in support of SOS is emerging, preliminary findings show:



- Increased engagement with healthcare service providers
- A reduction in illicit and intravenous drug use
- Decrease in opioid overdoses rates
- Decreases in the number of people experiencing homelessness
- Reduced engagement with survival sex work
- A decrease in money spent on street drugs

How is it helping improve the lives of PWUD?



There's a standard of drugs that you know what you're getting when you get this. Here, if you get it on the corner, you don't know what you're getting. You might think you do, but you don't.



Nobody has to steal anymore. Nobody has to do that. You can... satisfy your needs and do what you need to do without having to do anything illegal. I don't have to steal. I don't have to sell dope.

For more information and guidelines for prescribers, please visit:

[Safer opioid supply \(SOS\) programs: a harm reduction informed guiding document for primary care teams](#)

[Safe supply concept document – Canadian Association of People who Use Drugs](#)

[Health Canada toolkit: COVID-19 and substance use](#)



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