

Canada authorizes new drug consumption rooms

6 February 2017

Canada's health minister on Monday approved opening North America's first new drug consumption rooms in more than a decade, in an effort to contain the opioid overdose crisis.

Health Minister Jane Philpott granted a request from Quebec province's public health agency to set up three sites in Montreal's downtown Hochelaga-Maisonneuve and Ville-Marie neighborhoods.

"Supervised consumption sites have shown positive results in Canada as well as in other countries," Philpott said in a statement.

"Disease transmission and [overdose deaths](#) decrease, and infections, emergency room use and hospital admissions in relation to injection drug use are reduced."

The first North American consumption rooms, also known as supervised injection sites, were established at a clinic in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighborhood in 2003 under a special exemption from federal drug possession and trafficking laws.

Until now it had remained the only facility on the continent where addicts could receive medical supervision as they injected heroin illegally bought on the street.

Ottawa, Toronto and several other Canadian cities are also considering opening their own sites.

Vancouver's Insite clinic serves about 700 drug users a day, according to staff.

Health professionals for years have urged expanding the number of consumption rooms nationwide. Most neighborhoods have rejected them, however, and critics said public monies would be better spent on more detox and [drug](#) treatment.

In December, faced with soaring fentanyl overdose deaths, the federal government removed legal hurdles to opening new supervised injection sites.

The coroner in westernmost British Columbia, which is at the epicenter of the opioid crisis, reported 914 "apparent illicit [drug overdose deaths](#)" in 2016—a 79.2 percent year-over-year increase.

Fentanyl-related deaths accounted for two-thirds of the total, it said.

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