

SAFER SUPPLY ENABLES LIFE: EXPANDING THE CONTINUUM OF CARE FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

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Background:

The toxic unregulated drug supply continues to be a leading cause of death for people who use drugs (PWUD) in Canada. Prescribed safer supply (PSS) programs aim to replace the toxic supply with pharmaceutical-grade medications of a known content, quantity, quality, and potency that provide the mind/body altering properties of drugs to PWUD at high risk of overdose. PSS programs are intended to save lives and improve quality of life by providing PWUD with access to life-saving wraparound care embedded in primary health care settings and community health centers.

Description of model of care/intervention:

PSS makes use of regulated health professionals' ability to prescribe pharmaceutical drugs. It encompasses Injectable Opioid Agonist Treatment (iOAT), Tablet Injectable Opioid Agonist Therapy (TiOAT), vending machine models, and daily dispensed tablet programs. Programs offer a continuum of care based on a harm reduction foundation that includes facilitating access to basic primary health care, Hepatitis and HIV testing and treatment, harm reduction services and supplies, substance use counseling and treatment, and a range of social supports.

Effectiveness:

Emerging research demonstrates that safer supply saves lives and improves quality of life. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies show that PWUD engaged in PSS programs experience significant reductions in overdose and overdose risk, street-acquired drug use, and involvement in illegal activities. Research also demonstrates meaningful improvements in physical and mental health, social relationships, and stability. PSS programs are most effective when PWUD are included at all stages of planning, implementation, service delivery, and evaluation.

Consultation and next steps:

PSS programs rooted in harm reduction that are compassionate, lower-barrier, person-centred, and person-led are central to the success of each individual and each program. Knowledge and insights gained from this presentation can be used to implement effective models of PSS in primary health care settings and community-based health clinics.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no interests to disclose.

Keywords:

Cascades of care/linkage to care; drug use; drug treatment; harm reduction; primary care; safe supply

Biographies:

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As a staff member of the Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs (CAPUD), Alexandra works as a Knowledge Mobilization Specialist for the National Safer Supply Community of Practice (NSS-CoP). As a

drug user, she is passionate about harm reduction, drug policy, safe supply, decriminalization, community organizing, and abolition.

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