

July 24, 2006

Libby Davies (MP, Vancouver East) Calls for Federal Permit Renewal for Successful Safe Injection Facility

North America's first Safe Injection Site could be in jeopardy. Insite began as a three-year study in September of 2003, and legally operates due to an exemption by Health Canada under Section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. If the federal Minister of Health, Tony Clement, does not renew this exemption, the facility will shut down as of September 12, 2006. This would create a destabilizing and harmful impact, as Insite has proven to be successful in reducing the harm associated with drug use, and improving community safety and health in the Downtown Eastside.

The evidence of Insite's success in reducing harm speaks for itself. This program has led to an increase in drug users entering detoxification programs and addiction treatment (New England Journal of Medicine), has attracted the highest risk users most vulnerable to HIV infection (American Journal of Preventative Medicine), and most importantly, an estimated 453 drug overdoses has resulted in zero fatalities thanks to the expertise of health professionals at the facility. On the issue of crime, Insite has not led to increases in drug trafficking, assaults, or robbery, and has seen a decline in vehicle break-ins and theft (Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention and Policy). It has also reduced public injections and syringe disposals, improving the overall public order for the community as a whole (Canadian Medical Association Journal).

Insite is part of the city of Vancouver's comprehensive "Four Pillars" Drug Strategy: harm reduction, prevention, treatment, and enforcement. Many prominent individuals and groups have come out in support of this program, including Mayor Sam Sullivan, Senator Larry Campbell, the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association, and the Chief Constable of the City of Vancouver Police Department.

As the evidence on Insite's success continues to grow, more and more people from across Vancouver, and indeed, across Canada, are realizing the benefits of this harm reduction program, and in many cases, demanding similar programs in their own communities. Insite has proven to be an essential tool for saving lives, reducing disease and crime, and improving the overall community in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. I urge the Health Minister to look at the evidence and ensure this program is continued. If this facility is shut down, it will have a serious negative impact on the community and local businesses. I call on the Minister to make the right decision, and renew the exemption so that Insite can continue to help the people of Vancouver deal with the problems associated with drug use.

Libby Davies has written to the federal Minister of Health, Tony Clement, on this matter. Please see the enclosed letter.



July 4, 2006

The Hon. Tony Clement, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
Room 278 Confederation Building
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

I am following up on a letter that I sent to Prime Minister Harper, and copy circulated to you, on June 1st of this year regarding Vancouver's Safe Injection Site, known as Insite. In that letter, I included a recent study by "Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy", which showed that Vancouver's Insite was not associated with a marked increase in drug-related criminal activity. In fact, it showed a significant decline in break-ins and thefts since its opening. However, since Insite is up for federal review in September, I felt it urgent that you receive as much evidence as possible that shows the success of Insite, in the belief that Insite must continue.

Enclosed, I have included a research summary by Vancouver Coastal Health, which shows the tremendous success of Insite in reducing harm to those who use illicit drugs. Most notably, the research shows that Insite is leading to an increase in users who choose to enter detoxification programs and addiction treatment, and that 453 overdoses have resulted in no fatalities thanks to the availability of qualified medical staff. I hope you find the included facts helpful to recognize that Insite is performing well and needs ongoing support.

Because of the importance of Insite in reducing harm to so many of my constituents in the downtown eastside of Vancouver, I am requesting a meeting with you in order to further discuss this matter. I hope you will seriously consider my request. I feel very strongly that the evidence is clear, and would welcome the opportunity to let you know how strongly Insite is supported in Vancouver.

I thank you for your time, and anxiously await your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Libby Davies, MP
Vancouver East

