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July 26, 2006

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, PC, MP  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to urge you to renew the exemption allowing the InSite Supervised Injection Site experiment in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver to continue.

I'll never forget walking down Hastings Street for the first time during a visit in summer of 1999. Every few feet, I walked past and over addicts strung out on heroin actively injecting on the street. I remember thinking that it felt like walking down a street of lost souls.

Drug addiction is a tragic medical condition that currently devastates all too many lives, families, and communities in Canada, particularly in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. Research has shown that many drug addicts in the Downtown Eastside suffer from serious multiplicative mental, emotional and physical disorders. For many, their lives have been filled with tragedy and despair, and many are struggling with severe health issues in addition to their substance addictions including AIDs, Hepatitis C, malnutrition, bacterial infections, and depression. These broken spirits often end up addicted to drugs as a poor respite from severe pain and hopelessness in their lives. The four-pillar's approach – including the pillar of harm reduction – has so far been successful in helping address this enormous public health crisis, and made impressive strides in reducing deaths from overdoses. Certainly harm reduction has been more successful than any other approach attempted in the past: mass imprisonment of addicts or simply ignoring the problem.

Several peer-reviewed journal articles demonstrate that the InSite Supervised Injection Site experiment has demonstrably saved lives by preventing the deadly consequences of drug overdoses. The onsite medical staff have reduced the need for emergency room visits by addicts experiencing an overdose, thus easing the burden on an overloaded ER system in the health care system. In its short period of operation, it has also improved the quality of life for residents of the Downtown Eastside

community and for the city of Vancouver more generally. InSite is a dramatic social experiment, but it is one that is working, and is being watched for potential replication across North American cities and globally.

Vancouver is not the only city in the world to have opened a safe-injection facility. There is strong empirical evidence from cities around the world from Sydney, Australia to Zurich, Switzerland that supervised injection sites like Insite have resulted in dramatic reduction of open-air drug use, and more importantly brought back social vibrancy and life into the streets. Allowing addicts to use drugs in medically supervised settings like InSite begins the process of healing, and returns social order to the streets. It allows people addicted to drugs the option to receive needed medical attention, or perhaps access addiction counseling and services to begin the long difficult road to recovery. The approach fits with Canada's aspirations to be a just society.

I strongly support the renewal of the exemption that allows the InSite Supervised Injection Site experiment to continue. Please extend the operating exemption under Section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act critical for the continued legal operation of InSite. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Dan Zuberi

Assistant Professor of Sociology  
University of British Columbia