

Addicts, health officials trumpet success of safe injection site

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VANCOUVER - One year after the opening of Vancouver's safe injection site for heroin addicts, health care officials say it is a resounding success.

The injection site in the city's Downtown Eastside is meant to provide a safe place for addicts to shoot heroin or smoke crack and crystal meth under the supervision of health care workers.

Proponents said the clinic has saved lives, cleaned up the streets and slowed the spread of diseases like HIV. The clinic is part of a three-year, \$3.7-million pilot project funded by Health Canada and the B.C. government.



Safe drug injection sites aim to fight the spread of blood-borne diseases.

Greg Liang credits the site with saving his life by preventing an overdose.

"It was really good heroin," recalled Liang. "I just started to fall asleep. And what people do is they stop breathing and my breathing got really shallow and they picked up on it right away and gave me oxygen."

Ida Goudreau, CEO of the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, said more drug users than expected are visiting the site, and many are being directed to treatment to wean them off heroin.

"It has exceeded the expectations that we within the health authority had for it," Goudreau said.

The harm-reduction approach works, according to Alex Wodak, the director of alcohol and drug services at St. Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, Australia.

"If it is easier to get help from drug treatment than a drug dealer, it's possible for that community to make progress," said Wodak.

"On the other hand, if it is easier to get help from a drug dealer than it is from drug treatment, then that community is going to go backwards."

A report commissioned by Health Canada on the site's first year of operation will be released on Thursday, outlining its successes and failures.