

Satellite Harm Reduction Sites Project

Acknowledgements

This project was conducted on Indigenous land throughout Manitoba including Treaty 1, Treaty 2, Treaty 4 and Treaty 5, specifically on Anishinaabe, Ininew, Anish-Ininew, Dene, and Dakota land and also in the homeland of the Metis Nation.

Satellite sites, like all harm reduction initiatives, are grounded in the work of people who use drugs. This project was initiated with the invitation and approval of Peer Advisory Councils of people who use drugs. It remains important to acknowledge that peers and people who use drugs are constantly working to keep each other, themselves, and their communities safe. This project largely was an effort to better support work that already happens, and could happen more effectively with better resources. This project also builds off the work of people who use drugs in Toronto through the Parkdale Queen West Community Center.

Introduction

In March of 2022 the MHRN launched the operations of 9 peer-led satellite distribution sites. Locations included Powerview-Pine Falls, Sagkeeng First Nation, Selkirk, Swan River, NorthWest Interlake, Brandon, and 3 sites in Winnipeg. The project ran for one year.

Regular activities at the sites included supply distribution and outreach, including naloxone and overdose training and response.

Peer operators were supported with a monthly honorarium, weekly supply drop offs, coverage for food and phone costs, and the purchase of requested additional supplies. Additionally peer operators received training and certification in First Aid and naloxone use, and met 4x across all sites to network with each other.

Successes

**"I was proud to do this work"
-Satellite Site Operator**

The project had meaningful success at reaching folks who do not otherwise access harm reduction services. Beyond the statistics that show a notable, low cost, distribution of harm reduction supplies, a large success of the project was the information sharing between Satellite Site operators and the people accessing their services. Satellite site operators report sharing information about overdose and harm reduction in most of their interactions. They also

provided 172 referrals to services. The flexibility of satellite site services also allowed them to follow current, and site specific, substance use trends in real time- particularly shifts from stimulant use to depressant (down) use- and respond to the differing supplies and risk information for each using this grass roots approach.

Stats!	
New Contacts	1275
Repeat Contacts	7956
Syringes Distributed	233293
Bubbles Distributed	19533
Stems Distributed	1799
Naloxone Distributed	1338

An unanticipated success was the reflections of the satellite site operators themselves who reported an increase in confidence and participation in mutual aid and other community efforts.

**“Makes me feel less like a delinquent junkie, and more like a contributing helper”
- Satellite Site Operator**

Further unanticipated benefits were positive impacts on the services offered by other community organizations. A coordinator of Street Connections, a Winnipeg based outreach service, commented on how this project, providing supplies to a specific suburban site, meant that they did not have to make that far drive weekly and thus were able to serve more centrally located residents during its operation. They elaborated that increased “sprawl” in Winnipeg presents significant challenges to their limited capacities as a single vehicle service, and that locating services “closer to home” has significant advantages.

Lessons Learned

Challenges to this project were mostly rooted in the ways that systems of oppression and capitalism intersected with the work. For example, challenges with housing impacted the stability of the satellite site operators themselves, and challenges with securing and keeping a phone impacted communication between operators and staff.

Additionally, there were challenges with securing adequate supplies to meet the high demand. Harm reduction supplies, in particular Naloxone, but also occasionally other supplies like sterile waters, were limited due to provincial shortages that impacted the satellite sites.

Being on the front lines of the overdose crisis was not new to the operators but still was noted significantly as a challenge. Satellite site operators witnessed and responded to at least 40 overdoses and drug poisonings, in most cases 911/emergency services were not called. In a few cases the operators supported people in self-administering their Naloxone, but in most cases site operators did it themselves. More support is obviously needed as there are 0 permanent supervised injection sites in Manitoba, and only one Mobile Overdose Prevention Site in Winnipeg. Satellite sites are not designed to, and cannot wholly, meet this significant community need.

“Saving someone's life– it's scary but it makes you feel good that you brought someone back”

-Satellite Site Operator

How To Set Up A Satellite Site

Peer operators identified the following steps for organizations wishing to support satellite sites:

1. **Identify** helpers in your community. They should be people who use drugs and “live that life”. Ideally folks are in the populations most harmed by the stigma of substance use (BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ*, HIV/HepC+ etc).
2. **Ask** these folks if they would be interested in a satellite site project! May be helpful to orient them to what a satellite site project is and talk about what they would hope their version would be like and include.
3. **Apply** for funding! Satellite sites should be funded. Include basics like honorarium/wages, supervision/support, supplies, phone/internet for operators, and a slush fund for supplies that may be requested for the sites.
4. **Set Up**– Encourage operators to set parameters/boundaries and decide how they want their site to look. We found it helpful to categorize the sites as either an outreach site (ideal for operators without stable housing) or a stationary site (ideal for folks with stable and safe housing).
5. **Support** –Weekly check ins and supply drops, troubleshooting help. Track whatever you have to for your funder. Expect disruptions, challenges and roll with it!
6. **Tell others!** Highlight the work people who use drugs do to support their communities.

What's next?

This project has had its funding extended for a year! While operations will remain similar, sites will be operating as either a stationary site, or an outreach site specifically to help clarify roles and responsibilities, and the process for supporting the sites. Additionally, the operators will receive training on wound care, at their direction and request, and develop a wound care zine to disseminate this information to other people who use drugs.