

To: Premier Doug Ford and Health Minister Sylvia Jones

*“Whoever saves one life, saves the whole world.” -- Mishnah Sanhedrin, Chapter 4, Paragraph 5  
(Quoted in Quran, 5:32)*

As faith leaders in Ontario, we are deeply distressed by the decision of the provincial government to close 10 of the 17 safe consumption/overdose prevention sites in Ontario, and to create legislation which will prevent any new sites from opening, and which will force at least one additional site in Toronto to close imminently.

Ontario is currently in the midst of a deadly overdose crisis that claims one life every 8 hours. These safe consumption/overdose prevention sites are at the front-lines of this crisis, having reversed 21,000 overdoses since 2020. Without these sites, thousands of people will die entirely preventable and unnecessary deaths. These people will be our friends, our relatives, members of our faith communities. They are precious and irreplaceable lives. They are beloved human beings who deserve to live, not to die in a park or a doorway or a public washroom.

We know that these sites are a lifesaving medical service. We also know that they provide not only overdose reversal, but connections to community, mental health care, addiction counselling, and recovery resources. Some of us have seen at first-hand how workers at these sites meet people where they are, build trust, and help them to move towards health and stability. The 10 sites slated for closure refer approximately 131 people a day to other health and recovery services, as well as, in some cases, providing these services in-house, as some of the sites are part of multi-service agencies.

The sites are located in the areas of greatest need, and embedded in their communities, where they need to be. In most cases, they are such well-managed and peaceful presences that they can hardly be noticed. We understand that neighbourhoods with high rates of overdose death are usually areas of deprivation and difficulty, but closing the sites will lead to more discarded needles in the streets, more public drug use, and, in all probability, higher rates of crime.

Your statement quotes figures claiming that rates of crime are higher near safe consumption and overdose prevention sites, but without stating your sources, although this has been requested by the media. Furthermore, it fails to compare these rates to the same neighbourhoods before the sites opened, or to examine trends over time in major cities. Meanwhile, a well-documented study in *The Lancet* has demonstrated that overdose deaths dropped significantly in key areas of Toronto after safe consumption/overdose prevention sites were opened.

It is now known that two expert studies commissioned by your government to examine the safe consumption site at the South Riverdale Community Health Centre in Toronto, did not recommend closure, and in fact recommended an expansion of safe consumption sites around the city.

The statement includes a promise that \$378 million will be put towards “19 new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hubs.” This is potentially welcome news, given that there is currently a very lengthy wait for substance use disorder treatment. However, these hubs are not replacements for safe consumption and overdose prevention sites. You cannot bring a dead person to recovery.

We are also deeply troubled that these hubs will be barred not only from providing supervised consumption, but also from providing sterile injection equipment, an extremely well-established and

proven public health measure which has been in place for decades, and is known to be a crucial tool in preventing the spread of blood-borne disease and infectious and bacterial complications. Nor is it clear that the sites will use the accepted and evidence-based treatment methods recommended by experts. There are concerning signs that the intention of the provincial government is to roll back harms reduction entirely, which would result in an unimaginable number of illnesses and deaths, and a massively increased burden on first responders and the health system.

We urge Premier Ford and Minister Jones to reverse this decision, and to follow the advice of the expert reports which they themselves commissioned.

**Signatories:**

The Right Reverend Andrew Asbil, Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Toronto  
The Right Reverend Susan Bell, Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Niagara

The Right Reverend Dr. Michael Pryse, Bishop, Eastern Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in  
Canada

The Reverend Adam Snook, Assistant to the Bishop, Eastern Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in  
Canada

Rafael Rodriguez, Director of Public Policy and Service Ministries, Eastern Synod, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in Canada

Rabbi Aaron Flanzraich, Senior Rabbi, Beth Sholom Synagogue  
Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl, CM, Rabbi in Residence, Kehillat Beth Israel, Ottawa; Rabbi Emeritus,  
Beth Tzedec Congregation, Toronto

The Reverend Maria Christina (Tina) Conlon, President, Shining Waters Regional Council, United  
Church of Canada

The Reverend Nancy Ferguson, Chairperson, Canadian Shield Regional Council, United Church of  
Canada

Richard Auckland, President-Elect, Speaker, Antler River Watershed Regional Council, United Church  
of Canada

The Reverend Susan Dehaan, President, East Ontario Outaouais Regional Council, United Church of  
Canada

The Reverend Dr. Karen Hamilton, former General Secretary, Canadian Council of Churches

Imam Abdul Hai Patel, Director of Interfaith Relations, Canadian Council of Imams

Dr. Barbara Landau CM and Shahid Akhtar, Co-Chairs, Canadian Association of Jews and Muslims

The Reverend Dr. Susan Eagle, Chair, Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

***Neighbours of the Kensington Market Overdose Prevention Site:***

The Reverend Canon Maggie Helwig, Church of St Stephen-in-the-Fields (Anglican)  
The Reverend Jeffrey Dale, College Street United Church  
Rabbi Aaron Levy

***Neighbours of the Parkdale Queen West Bathurst Site:***

The Reverend Alison Kemper, St Matthias Bellwoods (Anglican)

***Neighbours of the Regent Park Safe Consumption Site:***

The Reverend Angie Hocking, Regent Park Community Ministries

Rachel Tulloch, Pastoral Director of Sanctuary

***Neighbours of the Moss Park Overdose Prevention Site***

Rafi Aaron, Spokesperson, the Interfaith Coalition to Fight Homelessness

The Reverend Canon Dr. Alison Falby, All Saints Church-Community Centre (Anglican)

The Reverend Alexa Gilmour, St Luke's United Church

***Neighbours of The Works:***

The Reverend Pam Trondson, Holy Trinity, Trinity Square (Anglican)

Ralph Carl Wushke, Pastor, First Evangelical Lutheran Church

***Neighbours of the South Riverdale Safe Consumption Site:***

Reverend Karen Koiter, Little Trinity Church (Anglican)

Bri-anne Swan, Eastminster United Church

***Neighbours of the Guelph Consumption and Treatment Services site:***

The Reverend Naomi Miller, Church of the Apostles, Guelph (Anglican)

The Reverend Brian Wilker, All Saints Lutheran Anglican Church, Guelph

***Neighbours of the Hamilton Consumption and Treatment Services site:***

The Reverend Dr. J. Mark Lewis, Interim-Moderator, St Paul's Presbyterian Church (temporary home of the CTS)

***Neighbours of the Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Safe Consumption Site***

The Reverend Sebastian Meadows-Helmer, St Matthew's Lutheran Church, Kitchener

Deacon Scott Knarr, St Matthew's Lutheran Church, Kitchener

The Reverend Canon Preston DS Parsons, PhD, Church of St John the Evangelist (Anglican), Canon Theologian, Anglican Diocese of Huron

The Reverend James F. Brown, Deputy Rector, Church of St John the Evangelist (Anglican)