


F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, Commissioner	Health Department  AGENCY REPORT	
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	Subject: Position:	20-0189R – Informational Hearing - Overdose Prevention Sites <b>FAVORABLE</b>		

To: President and Members  
of the City Council  
c/o 409 City Hall

November 24, 2020

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Bill #20-0189R, entitled, “Informational Hearing - Overdose Prevention Sites.” The purpose of this resolution is to call upon Baltimore City agencies and advocates to “provide information about overdose prevention sites and how they could be established in Baltimore City.”

Opioid overdoses are a persistent public health crisis in Baltimore City and across the country. Between 1999 and 2014, opioid related overdose deaths quadrupled in the United States, increasing from an age-adjusted death rate from 1.4 to 5.9 per 100,000.<sup>1</sup> In just the first half of 2020, 427 opioid overdose deaths were reported in Baltimore City.<sup>2</sup> Combined with the effects of COVID-19, opioid overdoses and overdose-related deaths are anticipated to climb.<sup>3</sup>

Considering the devastating impact opioids have had on Baltimore City residents and their communities, BCHD has taken several steps to safeguard its population. In October of 2015, BCHD issued a standing order for naloxone, a drug capable of reversing opioid overdoses, which allowed for any resident to purchase the drug at a pharmacy located in Baltimore City.<sup>4</sup> BCHD continues to conduct naloxone awareness campaigns and trainings throughout the City. Moreover, BCHD has regularly engaged in public outreach to reduce stigma surrounding substance use disorder and developed a first-of-its-kind crisis stabilization center in 2019.<sup>5</sup>

Another unexplored option to address substance use disorder in Baltimore City is the establishment of an overdose prevention site (OPS). An OPS, also known as a “supervised consumption site,” is a “harm reduction intervention that helps to mitigate the harms of drug use,

<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, M., & Kerr, T. (2017, January). Overdose Prevention in the United States: A Call for Supervised Injection Sites. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5308167/>

<sup>2</sup> Cohn, M. (2020, June 11). Opioid-related deaths make a disappointing uptick in early 2020, possibly related to coronavirus. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://www.baltimoresun.com/health/bs-hs-overdose-deaths-first-quarter-20200611-r5pvlyzqrffo3ndvwc2oh3y7cy-story.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Naloxone. (2018, October 31). Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/naloxone>

<sup>5</sup> Baltimore City Stabilization Center. (2018, April 09). Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/baltimore-city-stabilization-center>

through onsite monitoring and rapid intervention by trained staff in the case of an overdose.”<sup>6</sup> A successful OPS will often offer safe consumption and observation rooms staffed by medical professionals, education and access to Medicated Assisted Treatment (MAT), recovery counseling, basic medical services, referrals, and support services such as housing assistance, public benefits, and legal services. This model reduces harm to a client’s health while connecting them to care and recovery.<sup>7</sup> Altogether, the program is part of a continuum of care for people with substance use challenges who often have complex medical needs including severe mental illness, HIV/AIDS, and/or Hepatitis C.<sup>8</sup>

At present, no OPS facilities exist in the United States. However, Philadelphia has sought to establish an OPS site, which is pending federal litigation.<sup>9</sup> In North America, an OPS was established in Vancouver, Canada as early as 2003, and several more are now situated throughout the Vancouver area.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the world, there are approximately 120 OPS in 11 countries and 2 in the planning phase.<sup>11</sup>

In evaluating the OPS model, it is important to note that no deaths have been reported in said facilities.<sup>12</sup> According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), OPS have led to “safer use for clients” and “wider health and public order benefits”- including the decrease of risky behavior that can lead to HIV or Hepatitis C transmission, drops in drug related deaths and emergency service calls related to overdose, and a greater uptake in treatment.<sup>13</sup> The EMCDDA also noted less public injecting and fewer syringes discarded in nearby areas.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, OPS in both Australia and Canada were linked to reduced street disorder and encounters with police.<sup>15</sup>

Given its cultural and demographic similarities, Canada’s OPS give perhaps the greatest insight into how such a model may translate to Baltimore City’s landscape. A 2011 study published in *The Lancet* found that fatal overdoses dropped by 30% in a Vancouver, Canada,

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<sup>6</sup> Pauly, B., Wallace, B., Pagan, F., Phillips, J., Wilson, M., Hobbs, H., & Connolly, J. (2020, May 21). Impact of overdose prevention sites during a public health emergency in Victoria, Canada. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7242015/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Special to the Capital-Star, P. (2020, November 19). Overdose prevention network advocates for Philly safe injection site: Pennsylvania Capital. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://www.penncapital-star.com/blog/overdose-prevention-network-advocates-for-philly-safe-injection-site/>

<sup>10</sup> Kennedy, M., & Kerr, T. (2017, January). Overdose Prevention in the United States: A Call for Supervised Injection Sites. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5308167/>

<sup>11</sup> Countries with OPS: Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, Sydney Australia, Canada, Spain, Denmark, Norway, France, Australia, Luxembourg, Ireland (1 planned), Scotland (1 planned). Supervised Consumption Services. (n.d.). Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://drugpolicy.org/issues/supervised-consumption-services>

<sup>12</sup> Pauly, B., Wallace, B., Pagan, F., Phillips, J., Wilson, M., Hobbs, H., & Connolly, J. (2020, May 21). Impact of overdose prevention sites during a public health emergency in Victoria, Canada. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7242015/>

<sup>13</sup> "Federal judge: Philadelphia's safe injection site is legal - Vox." 25 Jan. 2018, <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/1/25/16928144/safe-injection-sites-heroin-opioid-epidemic>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

neighborhood served by such a facility.<sup>16</sup> Since 2003, the first Vancouver OPS, Insite, has received more than 3.6 million visits to inject illicit drugs under supervision by nurses.<sup>17</sup> The facility has seen 48,798 clinical treatment visits and 6,440 overdose interventions without any deaths.<sup>18</sup> One study regarding Insite found that 75% of its clients reported a change in their injecting behavior as a result of using their services.<sup>19</sup> Another study found that 23% of respondents who had been Insite clients had stopped injecting by the end of the study period, and another 57% had entered addiction treatment.<sup>20</sup>

In Baltimore City, it is difficult to predict how an OPS would function given the above-mentioned legal hurdles faced by Philadelphia and the lack of OPS in cities with demographics akin to Baltimore's. However, a study led by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (BSPH) researchers published in June of 2019 in the *Journal of Urban Health* found that 77% of 326 survey participants who use drugs in three East Coast cities expressed willingness to use OPS.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, a Baltimore City-focused 2017 study led by Dr. Susan Sherman, a professor at the BSPH, estimated that a \$1.8 million annual investment in an overdose prevention site would save the health care system \$7.8 million each year through reductions in infections such as HIV and hepatitis C, ambulance calls, emergency department visits, and hospitalizations.<sup>22</sup>

Despite BSPH's findings, there are serious difficulties to establishing an OPS in Baltimore City including legality, funding (including the potential loss of federal funding for other City programs), and buy-in from community members and law enforcement. Additional research is needed. Regardless, BCHD is supportive of all safe and legal evidence-based approaches to addressing the opioid crisis and welcomes a discussion to determine whether overdose prevention sites are a viable option for Baltimore City. Therefore, BCHD urges a **favorable** report for Council Bill #20-0189R.

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<sup>16</sup> Marshall, B., Milloy, M., Montaner, J., Kerr, T. (2011, April 18). Reduction in overdose mortality after the opening of North America's first medically supervised safer injecting facility: A retrospective population-based study. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)62353-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)62353-7/fulltext)

<sup>17</sup> Insite user statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <http://www.vch.ca/public-health/harm-reduction/supervised-consumption-sites/insite-user-statistics>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bayoumi AM, Strike C. Report of the Toronto and Ottawa supervised consumption assessment study, 2012: St. Michael's Hospital; 2012

<sup>20</sup> Petrar S, Kerr T, Tyndall MW, Zhang R, Montaner JS, Wood E. Injection drug users' perceptions regarding use of a medically supervised safer injecting facility. *Addictive behaviors*. 2007;32(5):1088-93.

<sup>21</sup> "5 Things to Know About Overdose Prevention Sites | Hopkins ...." 25 Sep. 2019, <https://magazine.jhsph.edu/2019/5-things-know-about-overdose-prevention-sites>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2020.

<sup>22</sup> A. Amlani, G., IM. McIntyre, D., ME. Smith, N., IA. Binswanger, T., TA. Takahashi, M., E. Wood, M., . . . RP. Schwartz, P. (1970, January 01). Mitigating the heroin crisis in Baltimore, MD, USA: A cost-benefit analysis of a hypothetical supervised injection facility. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from <https://harmreductionjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12954-017-0153-2>