

DRAFT

About the Harm Reduction Action Society (HRAS).

HRAS is a non-profit society made up of current and ex-drug users, parents of drug users, health professionals and concerned groups and individuals. The purposes of the society are:

- To improve the quality of life for people who use drugs illicitly, and for their families, their friends and their communities.
- To empower people who use drugs illicitly to live healthy, productive lives.
- To reduce harm associated with the prohibition of drugs.
- To change the laws regarding the prohibition of drugs.
- To provide harm reduction services, health promotion services and other health care services.
- To promote public education and encourage activities that eliminate negative stereotyping of people that use drugs illicitly.
- To develop networks and coalition of informed people who will work to ensure public policies and practices that are favourable to people who use drugs illicitly.

Harm Reduction and SAFE INJECTION ROOMS.

At present, publicly funded programs operate to provide syringes and needles to injecting drug users with a clear understanding they will be used to administer prohibited drugs. In these circumstances, to shrink from provision of safe, sanitary premises where users can safely inject is somewhat short-sighted. The health and public safety benefits outweigh the policy considerations against condoning otherwise unlawful behaviour.
(Commissioner Wood, Australia 1997)

Graphic



Harm Reduction and Safe Injection Rooms.

The Harm reduction approach originates from two evidence-based arguments: 1.drugs cannot be eradicated from society, 2.not all drug users are able to stop using drugs. Harm reduction aims to protect drug users, and society at large, from the harmful effects of drug use. As a program, harm reduction does not require abstinence as a condition of participation.

Some harm reduction practices currently exist in Canada, for example, methadone maintenance and needle/syringe exchange. However, other measures such as heroin

maintenance and safe injection rooms (SIR's) do not exist. Because they do not address all aspects of drug consumption and related behaviour, current harm reduction programs are not truly "comprehensive."

What is a Safe Injection Room?

A safe injection room is a secure supervised facility that provides sterile equipment for injecting drugs, information about healthcare and access to medical staff and social workers.

Existing SIR's (in Europe) have registration procedures for their clients. Age restrictions vary, but most users must be 18 or over. All existing SIR's have rules; most prohibit dealing and all prohibit violence and the sharing of drugs. The injection room itself is supervised at all times.

What does a SIR look like?

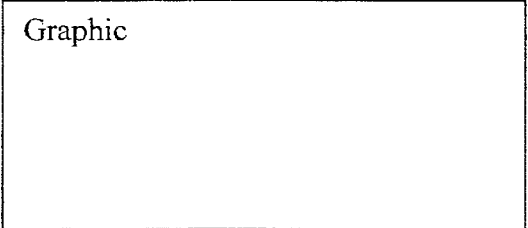
Externally SIR's do not look exceptional, blending in with the surrounding neighbourhood. A SIR building has three main areas, a waiting room, a clinic where injecting

and first aid equipment is kept and a space for safe injection. Many SIR's include a needle exchange, laundry, washrooms and showers.

Who works in a Safe Injection Room?

SIR personnel include trained users/consumers, medical and social work staff.

Graphic



What are the Benefits of Safe Injection Rooms?

- *Health.* SIR's provide immediate medical assistance. One person dies every day in B.C. from drug overdose. Wherever SIR's have been introduced, drug overdoses have decline dramatically. With the introduction of SIR's fatalities in Frankfurt declined from 147 in

1991 to 26 in 1997.¹ Rates of HIV and Hepatitis C infection have decreased in areas where SIR's are located. SIR's lower health costs associated with drug-related emergencies and illnesses

Stabilisation. Drug addicts are among Canada's most marginalized people. SIR's bring drug users into contact with services that can restore them to health and full citizenship. In Europe SIR's have been shown to act as an important route for addicts to access detoxification, Methadone and treatment programs. Far from promoting drug use, SIR's can be an addict's first step towards quitting drug use.

- *Crime and Public Nuisance.* SIR's play a vital role in tackling drug-related crime and public nuisance. Everywhere that SIR's have been established public consumption of drugs (for example in alleys and parks) has declined. Frankfurt's

¹ "Places where intravenous drug use is tolerated" in Bollinger, Lorenz, Stover, Heino, Fietzek, Lothar, *Drogenpraxis, Drogenrecht, Drogenpolitik*. Frankfurt, Germany 1995. 142-145.

integrated drug strategy has shown declines in categories of crime associated with drug use, including car theft and street robberies.²

with the need for community consultation and debate.

What Can You Do?

The challenge of Safe Injection Rooms.

Safe injection rooms are not “silver bullets.” They cannot eliminate health risks associated with drug use. However, they can *lessen* such risks - particularly when they are integrated with detox, methadone, and needle exchange programs.

SIR's have been shown to have a positive effect on the social and economic harms created by drug use. However, many Vancouver residents, businesses and law enforcement agencies remain unconvinced or uncertain of their value. Support from different levels of government is cautious.

Establishing a safe injection room in Vancouver calls for a strategy that balances the urgency of saving lives

² Polizeiprasidium Frankfurt. *Report on drug related criminality*, Frankfurt 1998.