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Over 200 Seattle healthcare professionals issue urgent call for supervised consumption spaces

Seattle, Washington: In response to Washington State’s overdose and opioid epidemic, over 200 health care professionals have signed a letter calling on the City of Seattle and King County to “fully fund and implement the Task Force recommendations, including the recommendation for supervised consumption spaces with the speed required in an emergency.”

“The published evidence on supervised consumption spaces is clear,” says **Dr. David Sapienza**, a primary care and addiction physician. “They reach some of the most marginalized people who have difficulty accessing care, and people who use the facilities more frequently are actually more likely to engage in future addiction treatment.” Dr. Sapienza adds, “We need to focus on expanding access to treatment services, and we need supervised consumption spaces as well. People who die never get the opportunity to recover.”

Supervised consumption spaces allow people to legally consume previously-purchased illicit drugs with supervision from peers and health care professionals who help make their use safer and connect them with medical care, drug treatment, and social services. Such spaces have been recommended by the **King County Heroin and Prescription Opiate Overdose Task Force**, endorsed by the **King County Board of Health**, and approved by **Seattle Mayor Ed Murray** and **King County Executive Dow Constantine**.

There were [500,000 opioid-related deaths](#) across the United States between 2000 and 2015. [Drug over dose deaths are anticipated to exceed 59,000 in 2016—the largest annual jump ever recorded in the United States—killing more people than traffic accidents and homicides combined](#) and [exceeding the number of deaths of U.S. soldiers for the entirety of the Vietnam War](#).

“Drug user health is both a human rights and a public health issue,” says **Michael Ninberg**, executive director of the **Hepatitis Education Project**. “The evidence is crystal clear: Safe (supervised) consumption sites around the world have reduced negative consequences of public drug use, including overdose death.”

There are nearly 100 SCS around the world. They have been [rigorously evaluated](#) and shown to steeply reduce overdose deaths, HIV and viral hepatitis infections, public disorder, and to increase access to drug treatment and other healthcare.

“Supervised consumption spaces start with recognition of all individuals' inherent dignity and worth,” says **Dr. Sunil Aggarwal**. “They help to make sure people are safe and have access to needed health and social services. We should start these sites without delay.”

The letter from the health care workers joins the growing call for such safer spaces in Seattle/King County, [where a record 359 people died of an overdose last year](#). Hundreds of residents have signed statements of support, and over 35 organizations have signed on to the “Yes to SCS” coalition in support of such spaces.

"Supervised consumption spaces are a great example of a public health initiative that will save lives," says **Dr. Glenna Martin**, a family physician who starts an addiction medicine fellowship in August at Swedish Addiction Recovery Services. “We learn in medicine to 'meet patients where they are' and SCSs will be an opportunity to do just that -- to help our patients navigate a path to wellness. As a physician I support any effort to build an SCS and to be there for those who need us."

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