

UPHNS HUB Video Call Minutes May 4, 2021

Attendance: 54

Presenters:

Dr. Jamie Livingston – On Alberta’s SCS Critique

Introduction:

- Welcome and Land Acknowledgement by Clement Fong
- Simultaneous translation description by Sophie Wertheimer
- Clement Fong offered everyone to introduce themselves in the chat box

Context:

- In Alberta, we saw the intention to undermine harm reduction through the establishment of the Supervised Consumption Review Panel in 2019, composed of people who have never worked in harm reduction and were instructed to ignore the merits of harm reduction in their report.
- The scope of the review was limited to “social and economic impacts” of an SCS on community. The panel traveled across Alberta to different communities that had SCSs or were trying to establish SCSs. They held town hall meetings with different stakeholders, which were characterized by our presenters as polarized environments.
- This report has ultimately resulted in the closure of one of North America’s busiest harm reduction services and the closure of the Boyle Street SCS. This is all under the guise of a methodologically flawed socio-economic review of SCSs in Alberta.

Alberta SCS Critique Presentation:

- [Dr. Livingston’s published critique](#) largely focuses on an objective analysis of what is in the report
- The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act harm the lives of PWUD. SCSs serve to reduce these harms. As per section 56.1 of the Act, these health interventions are required to justify their intersection with crime rates in exemption applications
- The SCS Review Panel used police service data, created an online survey asking people to report their perceptions of the sites and solicited anecdotal accounts from an undisclosed sample. There was no rigor to how this data was collected or analyzed
- The report solely includes crime and policing-focused narratives, which has resulted in a very poor evaluation of an essential service. Bad research is a serious threat to people’s health and wellbeing, as it can hinder the implementation of evidence-based policies and programs. When bad research enters the scholarly arena, there are ways to deal with it (e.g. peer reviews and critique papers), but when it enters the political arena, there are fewer safeguards to stop its spread. Notably, no members of the Review Panel were willing to put their name on this report.
- Absent from the data is important information about how people who use the sites have seen a decrease in criminalization. Also absent testimonials offered by people who have experienced no change or decreased crime in the communities. These opinions were conveniently discarded.
- The government of Alberta is trying to govern through crime, which only serves to increase fear, misinformation, and stigmatization.
- SCSs do not have special powers to magically produce crime. There is no credible evidence that SCS increase crime, while there is evidence that they improve safety and save the lives of people who use drugs.

Discussion:

- **Q: How did they gauge decrease in property value?**
 - A: They used a belt line. They did not give a time range. They used unrelated measures (e.g. number of restaurants opened).
- Comment: At the town hall, there were quite a few community members in attendance. While the “NIMBY” attitude was present, there were also concerns of community business impacts. The Aware Drug User Group made contact with a member of the Chinese Business Association and agreed that while on outreach, they would also do community clean up. They exchanged business cards and offered that Aware would volunteer to pick up discarded needles, etc. There were some great community connections made, and the NIMBY attitude was not coming from the community, but from the panel itself. We have had many instances now where businesses and community have stepped up to help in the inner city and so I think it was portrayed as a very head-to-head battle, but there were actually connections made on both sides. In terms of community trends, I think we are about to see some true disorder because we have only had data released in the province for the first two months of the year, it is likely that there is a lot of overdose death data from March that have not yet been reported. The nature of our work has shifted to keeping everyone alive.
- Comment: This panel could have been an opportunity to collectively address homelessness, poverty and other social issues in Edmonton.
- **Q: What does one do with this information, from both dispelling this harmful report to making sure it does not have more widespread damage to harm reduction services?**
 - A: There have been attempts to frame this as a misuse of public funds, but that hasn't gained much traction. When it is kept in the political sphere, it is very difficult to get rid of. Another avenue is to untangle some of the financial conflicts of interests of authors that have not been disclosed.
- **Q: How do we make sure that any rebuke to this report is accessible?**
 - A: Twitter! When Jamie published his critique, he accompanied it with a Twitter thread (@dr_jdlivingston) with gifs and plain language that was circulated quite well. There are ways of using social media for knowledge translation.
- **Q: Can we create a plain language summary of Jamie's critique?**
 - A: Yes!
- **Q: There are other things that Alberta cares a lot about. One of those things is the private sector. How do we bridge this seemingly unsurpassable gap between the private sector and harm reduction sector?**
 - A: It's about getting the messaging right. Plain language summaries are very valuable because we aren't talking to people who know a lot about these issues, just people who know what is happening at their storefronts. We have one business that works downtown that is supportive of HR, but does not like that their logo is associated with the SCS, so how do we help that business? We have told that person that we are lobbying city council to expand SCS. A suggestion was made to private sector representatives to <https://www.eachandevery.org/>. **Follow @_eachandevery on Twitter**
- Comment: Please connect with Shay Vanderschaeghe if you want to help lead the charge to rebuke this.

Other comments from Chat Box:

- I know some sites are still being closed. More recently Boyle Street in Edmonton, what if anything is being done in replacement of the closure of the sites?
- Is there any accountability for this type of state-sponsored misinformation other than the ballot box? Is there an accessible review process outside of academic spheres that can be leveraged by the public? More directly, are there jurisdictions where state-sponsored reviews are held to academic standards before being

made public?

- In the report, they stated that in Edmonton, neighbours were afraid of retribution from the Streetworks team, hinting at physical threat. Completely unfounded! I suspect it's a feeling rooted in stigma and racism, as half of my team have lived experience or are Indigenous.
- <https://www.drugpolicy.ca/open-letter-calling-on-the-alberta-government-to-retract-supervised-consumption-site-study/>
- I was walking with my acquaintance and we were passing encampment area. My acquaintance appeared not feeling comfortable and scared. I asked what contributed the most to his fear. His answer was not knowing what kind of people they are. I told him why he would say hello to them just like he would say hello to strangers he meets on the street. When I challenged him that those who use substance is someone's friend, someone's beloved parents etc., it changed his perspective towards people who use substance.
- Would it be meaningful to discuss the drafting of something (journal article, email blast, media piece) that really calls out the misrepresentations, flawed research and lies in this report?
- One thing may be making sure there is a plain-language, concise, and openly accessible critique of the report, and posting it as many places as possible. Basically so that if anyone is searching for the report, they also find the critique.
- You could see the dynamics of the collaboration of the panel, there were dominant voices and following voices who dominantly remained silent. I stopped the Mom on the panel who lost her son as the panel was walking off stage and told her who I was, my condolences and gave her my card with all my contact information as a National Leader with Moms Stop The Harm and encouraged her to join us for an environment of understanding and support. She started to tear up and was moved on by the chair to leave.
- <https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/canada/clear-abuses-of-public-funds-ndp-slams-luan-after-scs-review-panels-expenses-revealed/ar-BB18yNFL>
- Question: is there a place where we can find the names/info on the review panelists (since it's not in the report itself)?
- <https://www.alberta.ca/supervised-consumption-services-review.aspx>
- some of the comments Jamie mentioned are cited here: <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/doctors-dispute-claims-of-albertas-supervised-consumption-panel-member>
- From Kiyeon, Winnipeg : kkim@nynecircles.ca
- From Edna : We are here to support www.equitablenow.ca
- From Edna : Edna Email: executivedirector@equitablenow.ca
- Benefits of Stimulants Stimulus Connect 12 May 13, 2021 <https://stimulusconference.ca/stimulus-connect/>
 - From Dawn - CHPI @ CLDN : ddesouza@cldn.ca
 - From Shanell Twan : shanell@capud.ca
 - From Euan Thomson (he/him) : euan@raftbrewlabs.ca

Closing:

- Upcoming calls: At the end of May, we have a call with Harm Reduction Works and in June, we have a call with the CSSDP on their Cannabis Education Toolkit. Stay tuned for dates and times!
- Moment of silence. <http://globalnews.ca/news/7828353/alberta-opioid-crisis-memorial/>