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SAFE CONSUMPTION SPACE MESSAGES LIGHT UP THE NIGHT

Ninety days after the Seattle/King County Heroin and Prescription Opiate Task Force Recommended Supervised Consumption Spaces as Part of a Comprehensive Plan to Address the Opiate Epidemic, Endorsers Project Messages of Support Throughout the City

Seattle, WASHINGTON – The Seattle sky lit up with messages in support for supervised consumption spaces on Tuesday night. Buildings around town briefly bore succinct, factual assertions in support of establishing supervised consumption spaces (SCSs). Supervised consumption is an evidence-based intervention in which people who use drugs can use in a medically supervised setting with connection to other services. SCSs have been shown to produce positive health outcomes for participants, as well as reduce outdoor drug use in neighborhoods. While such services have existed for more than two decades in Europe, none yet exist in the United States.

In September of 2016, the Seattle/King County Heroin and Prescription Opiate Task Force issued a set of recommendations to address the ongoing heroin epidemic, which nationally now claims more lives than either gun shot wounds or automobile accidents. Convened by Mayor Ed Murray and King County Executive Dow Constantine, the Task Force met over the course of several months before issuing a set of nine recommendations to address prevention, drug user health, and treatment. Supervised consumption spaces, referred to as “Community Health Engagement Locations” (CHELs), were included in the comprehensive approach to addressing the crisis. The Mayor and Executive are expected to issue an official response to the Task Force recommendations shortly after the New Year.

“We appreciate that the Mayor and the Executive have expressed a commitment to follow the science and evidence in designing a local response to the heroin epidemic. Supervised consumption spaces make sense – they connect people who are living with substance use disorder with a system of care, and they make sense for neighborhoods struggling to reduce outdoor drug use. We know that safe consumption programs in other countries improve matters including with respect to neighborhood conditions, and we need to make similar strides here.” said **Sokha Danh, Neighborhood Safety Advocate, Public Defender Association.**

“Years ago we stepped out of the shadows and provided needle exchange to curb the HIV epidemic,” says **Tony Radovich, a Capitol Hill resident and HIV activist.** “We can and must take this logical step forward to stop overdoses, connect people to care, and meet people where they are at.”

Dr. Glenna Martin, MD, MPH, a member of the **Health Care Workers for Supervised Consumption Spaces** states, "I have been honored to participate in the medical care of folks with addiction in my medical training, and hope that our city will do the responsible thing by expanding harm reduction services and access to comprehensive recovery services. We all deserve dignity and safety in our everyday lives - no exceptions. Safe consumption spaces are not just good medicine, it's the right thing to do."

Sidney Wilson, an activist with **VOCAL-WA** explains, "If we are going to be serious about racial justice reform, we have to be serious about drug policy reform. The war on drugs was never really a war on drugs – it has always been war on poor people and people of color. Safe consumption spaces are a part of ending that war."

Andrew Sigman, an **HIV researcher and Queen Anne resident**, stated, "As a community, we must come together to address the co-occurring crisis of homelessness and substance use disorder. It is time for innovative solutions based in science. Doing the same thing we have always done --- arrest, stigmatize, isolate, push people from one neighborhood to another – is bad for neighborhoods and bad for individuals. Supervised consumption spaces are an important part of helping bring people who are outside into a place where they can receive care, be treated with dignity, and connect with compassionate and skilled health care providers."

The projected messages shone throughout Seattle on Tuesday night in the hopes of helping people understand the issue from a public health, public safety, and harm reduction point of view. Messages drew attention to the fact that SCSs are a way to keep people as safe and healthy as possible, allowing for the ongoing opportunity to develop relationships and change lives, stating "*People who DIE of an OVERDOSE don't RECOVER*," while another explained the health benefits, "*SCSs Prevent: Hepatitis C, HIV, Fatal Overdose. Safe Consumption Spaces Reduce the Harm*." The stark contrast in overdose outcomes achieved in safe consumption sites was highlighted with the messages:

***Overdose Deaths in
King County in 2015:
320***

***Overdose deaths in
an SCS ever:
0***

The light projection is one of several recent actions in support of SCSs, with the **Health Care Workers Coalition for Supervised Consumption Spaces** recently performing a die-in and press conference on the issue, **VOCAL-WA** hosting events such as the **SAFE SHAPE** mock

supervised consumption space in Seattle, and more than thirty organizations joining the “**Yes To SCS**” coalition, which launched in September of this year.