STATEMENT BY YWCA ONTARIO ON THE CLOSURE OF CRITICAL SAFER DRUG USE SITES ACROSS THE PROVINCE & APPEAL DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF FALL SESSION.

Safer Drug Use Sites Save Lives: Repeal the closures and recommit to harm reduction.

The YWCA Ontario Coalition is deeply concerned by the provincial government's decision to close Consumption and Treatment Service (CTS) Sites service sites and its refusal to permit new programs to open.

Supervised consumption and treatment services/sites play a critical role in our communities, providing essential support and resources for those using substances. These sites are facilities where trained professionals provide support, healthcare, counselling and deep compassion.

For the many women, especially those who may be vulnerable to violence or exploitation, CTS sites are the only indoor spaces where they can experience community, safety, and respite without fear of judgment. Without CTS sites, they will be pushed further into isolation and face increased risk of violence, exploitation and harm.

The ability to choose when, where and how to access treatment options remains the best way to ensure successful outcomes and life beyond drug use. More people can be encouraged to choose treatment through time, trust, and increased options - all available through CTS sites across Ontario.

The supportive housing dollars dedicated through HART hubs are a welcome assistance for those transitioning from encampments and shelters and looking to rebuild their lives after both addiction and/or homelessness. **These additional addiction services are essential, but cannot replace supervised consumption sites.** CTS sites play a vital role in addiction management and treatment strategies and any viable supportive housing model must include widely accepted models of harm reduction.

As advocates for women, families and children, we want to be clear - the safety of children is not at odds with harm reduction spaces. A CTS site offering supervised and supported use near children's spaces is much safer than any unregulated or unsupervised use in public spaces. Without safe, sanitary facilities for use and disposal, more drug use will occur in public spaces, increasing not just the visibility of drug use but also danger through potential exposure to community members, including children.

We know that the government shares our goal to create safer communities, a reduction in toxic drugs, better treatment options and the preservation of human life. Safe and supervised consumption options are one intervention along a continuum of necessary services that work in tandem to address this dire public health priority.

With the legislature's fall session beginning this week, we urge the government to work in good faith through meaningful dialogue with experts and the communities that will be most affected by these closures, including those who operate these sites.

We ask the government to consider the following:

1. Keep all Consumption and Treatment service sites open.
2. Reevaluate the need to move these sites outside of a 200m radius of childcare facilities and schools.
3. Ensure that HART Hub programs follow expert recommendations in harm reduction.
4. Create a sustainable supportive housing operations fund with provisions for addictions and mental health and gender-based violence support services.
5. Denounce involuntary treatment as a regressive policy.