

# Supervised Injecting Facilities.



## What are Supervised injecting facilities?

*“An injecting centre provides the setting and the possibility for a new type of connection with our clients. The power of suspending judgement for those who are the most judged and vilified in our society can be transformative.”<sup>1</sup>*

Dr Marianne Jauncey, Medical Director,  
Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre  
(Sydney)

Supervised injecting facilities (SIFs) are dedicated spaces where illicit drugs can be used under the watchful eye of health care professionals (particularly nurses), social workers or other trained workers or volunteers.

They are typically located in areas experiencing high levels of public injecting and other drug use issues and are established as a harm reduction response.

SIFs provide their clients with clean injecting equipment; emergency care (including overdose response and wound care); education; access to rehabilitation, treatment and health care; and disease transmission prevention.<sup>2</sup>

Through the support of SIFs, clients often find a pathway to drug treatment services, health care, disease transmission prevention and other essential services such as housing or financial supports.<sup>3-8</sup>

These services are also known as Drug Consumption Rooms (DCRs), Supervised Consumption Sites (SCSs) or Safe Injecting Rooms (SIRs). Some services with medical staff onsite are called Medically Supervised Injecting Centres (MSIC), such as the Sydney MSIC.

### SIFs around the world

The first SIF opened in Switzerland in 1986 and there were 130 facilities operating globally by late 2020, including two facilities in Australia: Kings Cross, Sydney (opened 2001) and North Richmond, Melbourne (opened 2018).



## How do SIFs help?

### SAVING LIVES BY PREVENTING OVERDOSES

Trained staff supervise drug injecting that may otherwise happen in public places and under more dangerous conditions. When an overdose or other health issue occurs at a SIF, staff can give immediate emergency care, including the reversal of overdoses.

To date, there have been no reported deaths within SIFs around the world.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup>

*“Successful treatment and rehabilitation is only possible if someone is still alive. My son died in 1997, before the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre opened, and I will always wonder what may have been.”<sup>13</sup>*

Tony Trimmingham OAM, founder and CEO of Family Drug Support and author of ‘Not my family, never my child’.

### REDUCING HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH DRUG USE

SIFs’ staff provide advice and education around safer and more hygienic injecting practices, as well as providing clients with clean equipment, reducing the chances of:

- blood-borne infections such as HIV or hepatitis C and other health issues associated with the use of non-sterile injecting equipment or needle sharing
- rushed injections, resulting in injured or damaged veins – rushed injections often happen in public places when someone is afraid of being seen
- injecting in public which is commonly associated with bacterial infection
- unsafe disposal of needles and syringes.<sup>14-17</sup>

## PROVIDING PATHWAYS TO SUPPORT SERVICES

SIFs are well placed to recognise and respond to the complex needs of people who visit the centre.<sup>8</sup>

Staff are able to engage and build trust with people who use the service and can help them access a range of wrap-around support services, such as referrals to drug treatment, physical and mental health services and employment, housing and financial supports.<sup>8,7,10,11</sup>

*“The MSIR has helped me a lot. Not just because I am able to safely inject, but you guys talk to me and help me with all kinds of things. I can even have something to eat and drink. I really trust the staff, I’ve had a few very low moments and the staff here has really helped me”<sup>18</sup>*

North Richmond MSIR client

## Who uses SIFs?

SIFs attract some of the most vulnerable members of the community, with many attendees considered ‘high-risk’.

These attendees may come from more marginalised population groups, have a history of unsafe injecting practices, and might be experiencing complex social and mental health issues.<sup>8, 19, 20</sup>

Clients attending a supervised injecting service in Germany reported histories of public injecting, imprisonment, sharing injecting equipment and unstable accommodation.<sup>21, 22</sup>

A surveyed group of frequent attendees to the Sydney SIF found that 82% of them had a mental health diagnoses; 96% had a history of trauma; 54% had attempted suicide; and a third had a history of self-harm.<sup>20</sup>

*“Our centre reaches out to some of the most disengaged and disadvantaged members of our community who often live life on the street.”<sup>13</sup>*

Dr Marianne Jauncey, Medical Director, Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (Sydney)

SIFs are a ‘low-threshold’ health service, meaning people can access full health care through them, even if they choose to continue using alcohol or other drugs.

Where a barrier to using other health care services can be the **stigma** experienced by clients<sup>23-25</sup>, SIFs are a safe, non-stigmatising space. People who attend report social acceptance, safety and refuge.<sup>26-28</sup>

*“I can’t really compare it to anything else, ’cause I’ve never really gotten any help anywhere else, other than there.”<sup>29</sup>*

Client of Insite, Vancouver’s injecting centre

### There is growing evidence that SIFs can have a positive impact on:

- social connectedness and community
- emotional support and stress reduction
- safety and security
- current shelter status and search for housing
- health service access and use.<sup>26</sup>



## Benefits to the community

### REDUCED COST/BURDEN ON THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

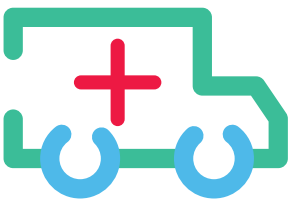
SIFs are an effective and efficient use of public health care resources.<sup>30</sup>

Resources and money are saved by:

- less ambulances attending overdoses
- less emergency department admissions
- Fewer costs associated with new HIV/Hepatitis cases, and other health conditions related to injecting drug use.<sup>10, 11, 30-33</sup>

Evidence shows:

Sydney	Ambulance call-outs to Kings Cross dropped by approximately 80% after the centre opened, <sup>10</sup> and the average monthly emergency department presentations that were opioid-related fell by 20%. <sup>33</sup>
Melbourne	Ambulance attendances involving <b>naloxone</b> (a drug that reverses opioid overdoses) have reduced by 25% within one km of the facility since it opened. <sup>11</sup>
Vancouver	Using conservative estimates, a study found that Vancouver's injecting centre prevents on average 35 new cases of HIV and almost three deaths each year. This provides a societal benefit in excess of \$6 million per year. <sup>30</sup>



### NO INCREASE IN DRUG-RELATED CRIME

Opponents of SIFs argue that they will lead to increased crime and drug use in the neighbourhoods where they are located.

There has been no evidence of this.<sup>34</sup>

Systematic reviews of SIFs around the world have shown that:

- establishment of a facility does not increase drug consumption, drug dealing or crime in surrounding areas.<sup>35</sup>
- SIFs are associated with improvements in public order without increasing drug-related crime.<sup>36</sup>

### REDUCED EVIDENCE OF DRUG USE IN PUBLIC

SIFs give people a private – safer – space to inject drugs. This reduces public injecting and discarding of injecting equipment, such as needles or syringes, which can otherwise be left lying around in unsafe places.<sup>37-40</sup>

Evidence shows:

Sydney	Six years from opening Sydney's MSIC the number of discarded needles and syringes collected in the local area approximately halved. <sup>33</sup>
Melbourne	There was a decrease in the proportion of residents (24% down to 20%) and business respondents (27% down to 22%) who saw public injecting during the centre's trial period. <sup>11</sup>

*"I remember the needles in the gutter and the constant ambulances before the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre opened."<sup>13</sup>*

Local Kings Cross resident and business owner (Sydney MSIC)

*"I am very grateful that this facility will continue to operate just down the road from where I live. Long may it continue."<sup>13</sup>*

Local Kings Cross resident (Sydney MSIC)

**For further information on the positive impacts of SIFs, see the following links below:**

What goes on inside a medically supervised injection facility?:

<https://theconversation.com/what-goes-on-inside-a-medically-supervised-injection-facility-87341>

Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre – Get to know our story:

<https://www.uniting.org/content/dam/uniting/documents/community-impact/uniting-msic/Get-to-know-our-story.pdf>

Findings from the evaluation of Vancouver’s Pilot Medically Supervised Safer Injecting Facility – Insite:

[https://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/insite\\_report-eng.pdf](https://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/insite_report-eng.pdf)

North Richmond Community Health – Changing lives:

<https://nrch.com.au/changing-lives/>

Reducing public injecting, improving amenity and saving lives:

<https://nrch.com.au/services/medically-supervised-injecting-room/>

International Network of Drug Consumption Rooms:

<http://www.drugconsumptionroom-international.org/>

Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre:

<https://www.uniting.org/community-impact/uniting-medically-supervised-injecting-centre--msic>



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