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“Yes to SCS” Coalition Forms in Support of Opening Supervised Consumption Spaces in the Seattle and King County Region.

Seattle, WASHINGTON – The newly formed “Yes to SCS” coalition applauds the Seattle/King County Heroin and Prescription Opiate Addiction Task Force for recommending that supervised consumption spaces, referred to as Community Health Engagement Locations (CHELs) in the Task Force report, be implemented in King County. The coalition includes a variety of community, public health, human service, and criminal justice reform organizations, as well as residents of the County, who stand in support of this life-saving intervention.

The Yes to SCS coalition arose out of growing need to create meaningful alternatives to the status quo in Washington State, where now more people die of accidental drug overdose than automobile accidents. The Yes to SCS coalition will work to ensure that the task force recommendations are fully implemented, focusing on educating the public and engaging with community stakeholders about the need for SCS facilities.

Supervised consumption spaces, where people who are living with substance abuse disorder can use pre-obtained drugs in a therapeutic environment, have been proven to reduce the risk of fatal overdose and prevent transmission of HIV and hepatitis C, as well as to reduce outdoor drug use in neighborhoods. These spaces also promote access to chemical dependency treatment and other supportive care, and increase public safety.

“VOCAL-WA started this campaign because it matters to us. These are our lives, the lives of our friends, our family, on the line. We have lost too many people to overdose, to jail, and to illness. Too many of us have contracted HIV or hepatitis C, lost limbs, or had infections. These things are preventable. They *can* be prevented and they *should* be prevented. If I had a clean place to be when I was using drugs, I wouldn’t still be fighting the infection I am today,” says **Turina James**, VOCAL-WA member. “I encourage the city and county to act on the Task Force recommendations and to act fast. This is an emergency,” she continues.

Michael Ninberg, Executive Director of the **Hepatitis Education Project** states, “This is not just a public health issue; it’s also about human rights and dignity. Furthermore, the evidence is clear: Safe (supervised) consumption sites reduce negative consequences of drug use, including overdose death.”

“This is the smartest, most innovative approach to taking care of our neighbors affected by a substance use and addiction public health crisis in our neighborhood and across our city. We need to act now!” says **Zachary Pullin**, president of the **Capitol Hill Community Council**.

Seattle is one of many cities with a growing consensus about the need for supervised consumption spaces. In New York, more than a dozen organizations have signed on to the “SIFNYC” campaign, including the Center for Constitutional Rights, Housing Works, Bronx Defenders, Southern Tier AIDS Program, and over 30 others. Similar coalitions have arisen in San Francisco, Portland, Baltimore, and Denver. In July, AIDS United, one of the largest HIV/AIDS organizations in the country issued a statement of support.

"A safe place for whatever reason, is always important and necessary. Ending stigma, being part of the solution and knowing there is a place where our community can benefit from is something we are proud to support," says **Luis Fernando Ramirez**, Executive Director of **Entre Hermanos**.

Julia Rosenfeld of **BABES Network YWCA** states, “As women living with HIV, we are intimately familiar with the ways that stigma affects our lives and health outcomes. Many of us have survived periods of drug use and addiction and are now in recovery, in part because of people who chose to treat us with respect and offer support while we were using. Safe consumption spaces are proven to be effective in reducing negative outcomes, including overdose death and HIV, and can help begin the process of ending stigma around drug use and allowing people to access what they need to thrive. These are our lives and our communities – we matter.”

“From Bellevue to Ballard to Bothell, we are hearing loudly from community members who want more help for people who need it. We are all searching for effective and proven tools to help us respond to and change the dynamic of this epidemic: opening Safe Consumption Sites,

together with implementing other recommendations from the Task Force, make up part of the solution,” says **Alison Eisinger**, Executive Director of the **Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness**.

“Giving people a safe and accessible place to use helps the entire community nearby. It helps people who use drugs by providing a sanitary place and staff that can help in other ways. It helps ease neighbors’ worries by providing a safe disposal site for needles. It can even give peace of mind to local businesses who may want to provide free and easy access to their restrooms but currently worry about drug use occurring in their facilities. It’s simple, can help a lot of people, and can positively affect the community,” explains **Devin Silvernail**, Executive Director of **Be:Seattle Organizing**.

VOCAL-WA kicked off its public education and advocacy campaign about safe consumption spaces with a Town Hall event, screening the documentary film “Everywhere But Safe” and hosting a panel of experts to talk about safe consumption, drug user health, and harm reduction. As a part of the campaign, VOCAL-WA and other coalition partners have engaged in a series of public events including public discussions with Liz Evans, co-founder of Insite, pop-ups of the SAFE SHAPE mock supervised consumption space, and events such as International Overdose Awareness Day. Since November, the coalition in support of supervised consumption spaces has tripled in size, with a more than a dozen organizations signing on to the coalition and hundreds of community members signing pledges of support.

“Yes to SCS” coalition partners include:

- Voices of Community Activists and Leaders – Washington (VOCAL-WA)
- Public Defender Association
- BABES Network YWCA
- Capitol Hill Community Council
- Hepatitis Education Project
- ACLU-WA
- Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC)
- Amber’s HOPE
- Gender Justice League
- Plymouth Housing Group
- Lifelong AIDS Alliance
- Real Change
- Tenants Union of Washington
- Heroes for the Homeless
- REACH
- Be: Seattle Organizing
- Entre Hermanos
- Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness
- Seattle Community Law Center