



**The Corporation of the  
City of Sault Ste. Marie**

**COUNCIL REPORT**

April 7, 2025

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council  
AUTHOR: Tom Vair, CAO  
DEPARTMENT: Chief Administrative Officer  
RE: Health Equity Centre

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**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to respond to a Council resolution regarding the establishment of a harm reduction and health equity centre.

**Background**

On May 28, 2018 City Council passed the following resolution:

Whereas opioid and other illicit drug use is a significant public health issue in communities across Canada, including the City of Sault Ste. Marie; and

Whereas the health harms of illicit drug use include not only addiction and overdose, but also an increased risk of blood-borne infections; and

Whereas Algoma has a high burden of hepatitis C, a blood-borne infection which is strongly linked to injection drug use, based on information presented by the Sault Ste. Marie and Area Drug Strategy; and

Whereas per provincial data visualized by the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre, the level of overdoses in this area suggests it may benefit from accessible harm reduction services such as needle exchange; and

Whereas on April 23, 2018 the Council of the City of Sault Ste. Marie committed to "continuing to work with and support the collective efforts of Algoma Leadership Table, Sault Area Hospitals, Group Health Centre, Algoma Public Health, Sault Ste. Marie Police Services and the Drug Strategy Committee to collectively address the opioid crisis and its consequences"; and

Whereas the Algoma Leadership Table is currently conducting an assessment of the needs and programming available in the community to determine where resources should be focused; and

Whereas the assessment by the Algoma Leadership Table will review the needs and programming not just in the City of Sault Ste. Marie, but across the District of Algoma;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved that the City of Sault Ste. Marie request that City staff work with the Algoma Leadership Table and engage other community partners as necessary to assess the need for harm reduction and health equity services specifically in Jamestown, in addition to the current needs assessment being undertaken by the Algoma Leadership Table, and report back to Council, and

Further Be It Resolved that City staff work with the Algoma Leadership Table and other community partners as necessary, to provide Council with an estimate of the cost for the establishment of said harm reduction and health equity centre.

### **Analysis**

Since the resolution was passed in 2018, several significant developments have occurred. The Covid-19 pandemic had an effect on the timing of the response to this Council resolution.

Further, community stakeholders were previously working together on the potential to establish a safe-consumption site (location not determined) when the Province announced pending legislation known as the *Community Care and Recovery Act* banning safe consumption sites within 200 metres of schools and daycares. The Province subsequently announced that it was closing ten, existing consumption sites by April 1, 2025 and transitioning to a new model featuring Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hubs.

Community stakeholders pivoted to developing an application for a HART Hub and, as Council and the community are aware, Sault Ste. Marie was successful in obtaining funding for a HART Hub. Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Sault Ste. Marie/Algoma branch will lead the implementation of the HART Hub in collaboration with other community stakeholders. The location for the HART Hub will be in the Community Resource Centre located at 721 Wellington St. E. (former Sacred Heart Catholic School).

On March 22, 2025, the Federal government announced that the City was successful in its application to the Emergency Treatment Fund (ETF). This funding will address the mental health, addictions, and overdose crisis in Sault Ste. Marie by creating a dedicated, 24/7 community outreach and wellness response team. The team will provide low-barrier access to medical, mental health, addiction, harm reduction, and housing support for vulnerable, high-needs populations both on the street, in supportive housing, and at key community locations.

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The City had to be the lead applicant on the ETF funding application due the funding criteria and staff worked closely with the CMHA, Social Services and other community stakeholders to develop the application. The total funding is \$3,557,503 over the next two years, and the City will enter into an agreement with CMHA to deliver the program on the City's behalf. The mobile wellness services will be able to visit locations across the community, including the James Street area.

Given these significant investments in the community to address mental health and addictions challenges, staff suggest that work to advance a separate health equity centre be discontinued. Staff will work with community partners to monitor the outcomes and results of these new services in the community and work with Mayor and Council to continue to advocate for ongoing investments in community health services as required.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications related to this report. An agreement with CMHA to allocate the \$3,557,503 received by the ETF will return to Council at a future meeting.

### **Strategic Plan / Policy Impact / Climate Impact**

This report aligns with the Corporate Strategic Plan 2024-2027, Focus Area 1 – Community Development, Well-being with the high-level goals to:

- Take a collaborative approach towards a healthy and safe community.
- Advocate for addiction and mental health services
- Advocate for improved healthcare facilities and personnel

### **Recommendation**

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of the CAO dated April 7, 2025 concerning the establishment of a harm reduction and health equity centre be received as information.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Vair

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