

SANDS Abstract for Healthy Cities 2023

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In 2022, 78,728 discarded needles were manually collected in Calgary. Our Strategies for Addressing Needle Debris (SANDS) Program addresses public safety issues associated with discarded needle debris and drug paraphernalia associated with injection drug use; specifically, those disposed outside of safe disposal containers. The SANDS Program has engaged with 35 partners, including City of Calgary units and Community Partner Agencies to develop municipal policy and public health interventions to address needle debris and support people who use drugs (PWUD).

20 Canadians die every day from drug poisonings. Current policy decisions in Alberta about drug poisonings are not based on scientific evidence. Some people fear that needle debris will harm their communities and are fearful of harm reduction services. Addressing needle debris may help decrease public opposition to harm reduction services, giving more PWUD access to life-saving healthcare.

For more than 20 years, many Calgarian agencies have been working on needle debris using siloed approaches. We aimed to bring together partners to create pragmatic strategies to address needle debris in our community. Our objective is to ensure that there is a low risk of harm from needle debris for all community members and the environment, and that PWUD have access to appropriate harm reduction services.

We have completed several community assessment projects to date, including an analysis of media reports, a scan of previous research on needle debris, interviews with leaders from multiple organizations and businesses, and 'go along' interviews with community partners as we

walked around Calgary. We are currently working with PWUD to learn more about where they choose to use drugs and why those locations are preferred.

The City of Calgary have adopted our initial policy recommendations. For example, we recommended that other partners take over daily management of the public needle bins, instead of the Calgary Fire Department. This change has avoided significant costs for Calgarians and freed up additional fire trucks to attend emergencies. With better policy and civic engagement around needle debris, we can a) target interventions for PWUD, and b) prevent harm from needles for everyone in our communities.