



# City of Seattle

Tim Burgess, Mayor

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## Seattle Women's Commission

October 31, 2017

Attn:

Mayor Tim Burgess  
Councilmember Sally Bagshaw  
Councilmember Lorena Gonzalez  
Councilmember Bruce Harrell  
Councilmember Kirsten Harris-Talley  
Councilmember Lisa Herbold  
Councilmember Rob Johnson  
Councilmember Debora Juarez  
Councilmember Mike O'Brien  
Councilmember Kshama Sawant

### **In support of funding for Community Health Engagement Locations in Seattle**

Dear Mayor Burgess and Honorable Councilmembers,

The Seattle Women's Commission stands in solidarity with the Human Rights Commission, LGBTQ Commission, and Commission for the People with DisAbilities by writing to urge your support and funding of Safe Consumption Spaces, also called Community Health Engagement Locations (CHEL sites) in Seattle, as well as the other recommendations advised by the Heroin and Prescription Opiate Task Force. Drug overdose and overdose-related deaths are not the only consequences of the opiate epidemic affecting Seattle, wider King County, the State, and nation. Violence, transmission of diseases such as hepatitis C and HIV, increases in incarceration rates, stigma, and increased use of limited healthcare and emergency response resources also compound the substantial social and public health impacts of the opiate epidemic.

The enormous economic costs of drug-related social and health problems take vital money away from desperately needed treatment and prevention programs for substance use disorder, as well as other important public health and social welfare programs serving women and the broader community.

Our Commission recognizes that many of the risks associated with drug consumption stem from the nexus of current and historic traumas and discrimination, as well as legal, economic, and other social dynamics. Women disproportionately bear these risks— particularly indigenous women, women of color, and transgender women— as well as gender nonconforming individuals. Histories of colonization, discrimination, and sexual, physical, and emotional abuse make substance use disorder more likely in women. Furthermore, pregnancy and gender-based violence expand the risks experienced by women and gender nonconforming individuals who



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consume drugs. Many of the harms of drug use in pregnancy arise from the health, social, and environmental factors associated with drug use by women. Women with substance use disorder are more likely to experience homelessness, intimate partner violence, malnourishment, mental health concerns, and sexually transmitted infections. Survival sex work, lack of access to safe supplies such as clean needles for injection drug use, inadequate access to healthcare and perinatal services, social stigma, and risk of gender-based violence and victimization when experiencing homelessness make pregnant women using drugs especially vulnerable. Stigma from healthcare providers also deters pregnant women who use drugs from seeking perinatal care, treatment for substance use disorder, and other needed services.

Implementation of the Heroin and Prescription Opiate recommendations, notably creation of a Safe Consumption Space or CHEL in Seattle, is urgent for the women and other marginalized communities of Seattle. Safe Consumption Spaces represent an evidence-based intervention to promote the health and safety of women and gender nonconforming individuals within Seattle. These spaces provide protection from the infectious diseases associated with shared supplies as well as from violence and victimization during periods of drug use. They also afford drug users with opportunities to seek treatment of substance use disorder and perinatal care if needed.

We compel the City Council to fund the creation of a Safe Consumption Space in Seattle and ask that you ensure that the unique voices and needs of women—especially indigenous women, women of color, and transwomen—and gender non-conforming individuals are considered throughout its design, implementation, and evaluation.

Sincerely, in concurrence with and on behalf of the Seattle Women's Commission,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Erica Soelling".

Erica Soelling, BSN, RN  
Commissioner - Seattle Women's Commission  
Doctor of Nursing Practice Scholar  
University of Washington School of Nursing