

# FIRST FOCUS

## VANCOUVER AGREEMENT

## BACKGROUND

# Vancouver Agreement launches four pillar approach for DTES revitalization

Vancouver is not the first jurisdiction in the world to grapple with the social, health and legal issues created by substance misuse. Some governments have been successful in reducing personal property crime, deaths from drug overdose, rates of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C infection, and the high cost of processing drug offences. Most of these jurisdictions have effectively addressed their issues by implementing a four-pillar approach that integrates initiatives in the areas of prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement.

Vancouver Agreement partners (i.e., the federal, provincial and City of Vancouver governments) are adopting a four-pillar approach in introducing the first phase of a comprehensive strategy to deal with problems associated with substance misuse in the Downtown Eastside, and across the region.

One of the goals of this phase of the Vancouver Agreement is to end the open drug use and dealing most evident at the corner of Main and Hastings Streets. Achieving this goal requires integration of health and enforcement programs in a new initiative that puts drug users in touch with the health and treatment services they need, and combats the illegal drug trade.

The first step in this strategic approach is the **redesign of the physical space in front of Carnegie Centre**. The Main Street side of the building will be reconstructed to feature a raised patio with low fencing attached to Carnegie. This will provide an outdoor smoking area with controlled access through the building thereby barring entry to people who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Bus stops on both Main and Hastings Street also will be moved. The public area in front of Carnegie on Main Street will be substantially reduced to discourage illegal activities, and the cement structure above the washrooms will be altered to provide better visibility for the police and greater security.

A further step in the strategic approach is a linkage between increased law enforcement and police presence with a continuum of care approach to treatment services for drug users. To avoid simply pushing the drug scene to another corner, a new **health connection program** will be set up at an indoor location in the vicinity of Main and Hastings. No drug use will be allowed at the health connection, but the program will offer basic health counselling and referrals, as

well as life skills training and social support services. This program will have the most direct and frequent interactions with street involved drug and alcohol users.

Working closely with health care professionals, **police will help drug users access health and treatment services.** This will be accomplished partly through an expansion of the program Saferide, as well as changes to the deployment of officers in the area.

By removing drug users from outdoor locations, police can more effectively **target drug dealers** and businesses that cater to the drug trade.

Additional funding for **street improvements**, such as graffiti removal and needle pick-up, will further enhance a sense of safety and order on the street.

The health connection will help drug users link to a new **Downtown Eastside treatment centre** which is part of a comprehensive support system that will provide a continuum of care in basic health care and drug treatment.

As part of this, a number of much-needed substance misuse services will be created or expanded including: a range of detox, sobering services, stabilization services, outreach, and methadone treatment. For example, withdrawal management (i.e., detox) programs will now include not only more residential withdrawal and home-based withdrawal programs, but also walk-in treatment. As well, additional detox beds will be established throughout the city.

Hours of operation at the Downtown Community Health Clinic will also be extended to provide more opportunities for the community to access health services.

In the longer-term, other initiatives are necessary to facilitate rehabilitation and help stabilize the lives of recovering drug users. **Improved housing**, both inside and outside the Downtown Eastside, plus jobs and opportunities created through economic and community development projects, such as **Partners in Economic and Community Help** fund, will support the longer-term success of these health and safety efforts.

In response to the community health and safety needs, the Vancouver Agreement creates a comprehensive approach that integrates re-design of public space and new enforcement initiatives with expanded health services, housing and community and economic development. A balanced implementation of the four pillar approach including prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement in the Downtown Eastside, and across the region, will improve the long-term health, safety and economic viability of the neighbourhood.