

## THE FOUR PILLARS - PREVENTION

Prevention refers to strategies and interventions that help prevent harmful use of alcohol, tobacco and both illegal and prescription drugs.

In November 2005, Vancouver City Council unanimously endorsed the drug policy prevention plan, *Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use*. The result of extensive research and diverse community consultations, the plan makes 27 recommendations. The strategy, which is the first of its kind at the municipal level in Canada, is comprehensive, integrated and based on the best evidence and research available. It aims to expand awareness, understanding and discourse around prevention. The plan seeks:

- Reduced individual, family, neighbourhood and community harm from substance use.
- Delayed onset of first substance use.
- Reduced incidence (rate of new cases over a period of time) and prevalence (number of current cases at one time in a population) of problematic substance use and substance dependence; and
- Improved public health, safety and order.

The 27 recommendations in the report map out a comprehensive strategy for reaching those goals. They call for public education, employment training and jobs, supportive and transitional housing and easily accessible healthcare. They also call for prevention efforts tailored to Vancouver's youth and its diverse ethno-cultural and Aboriginal communities. The recommendations address marijuana grow operations and methamphetamine labs, as well as the need for a syringe recovery system. The report calls for increasing limits on the sale of tobacco and a community partnership approach to the development and implementation of a comprehensive alcohol strategy. Finally, the report calls for legislative and regulatory changes to create a regulatory system for all currently illegal drugs that would increase our ability to control potentially harmful substances and limit the control that organized criminals have over these drugs.

The prevention of problematic substance use contributes to the public good by reducing costs to society as well as harm to individuals and communities. Important prevention goals include delaying the onset of substance use among youth and addressing the underlying causes of drug use. Prevention acknowledges that individuals usually make the best choices available to them, but that factors such as abuse, poverty or a history of addiction in the family may constrain those choices.

Of the four pillars, prevention requires the greatest amount of commitment and collaboration across all sectors of the community over a sustained period of time to show significant results. In the long-term though, prevention will have the greatest impact in reducing harm from substance use.

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