



Four Pillars News - March 2004  
Issue 1 Volume II

## IN THIS ISSUE

- [NAOMI Heroin Trials](#)
- [National Drug Strategy](#)
- [Methamphetamine Response](#)
- [VCH Addictions Services Redesign](#)

[Printer-friendly version](#) (PDF)

### About Us

Four Pillars News is published eight times per year for the Mayor's Four Pillars Coalition by the City of Vancouver.

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Lesli Boldt, Corporate Communications

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Mayor Larry Campbell  
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Richard Garlick  
Jennifer Vornbrock  
Zarina Mulla  
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### Links

[What are the Four Pillars?](#)  
[Coalition Members](#)

## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

### [Clinical Trial to Test New Treatment for Heroin Addicts](#)

by Jim Boothroyd, Communications Manager, Centre for Health Evaluation and Outcomes at UBC/St. Paul's Hospital

Researchers hope to begin a long-awaited clinical trial of a new treatment for people with severe cases of heroin addiction at a clinic in the Downtown Eastside this September.

[>>Read more](#)

### [Methamphetamine Response](#)

by Jennifer Vornbrock, Manager of Youth and Women's Addiction Services, VCH

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[>>Read more](#)

### [Addictions Redesign at VCH](#)

by Naomi Brunemeyer, Regional Communications Officer, VCH

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) is in the process of redesigning addiction services, for which it assumed management in 1999. The redesign process is built on a number of community consultations and documents outlining gaps in addiction services and proposed programs to address the gaps.

[>> Read more](#)

## MAYOR'S COLUMN

### [Improving Prevention and Treatment](#)

by Mayor Larry Campbell

The Forum on the prevention of



problematic drug use held at the Wosk Centre for Dialogue on November 20 and 21, 2003 marked the beginning of a new challenge for all of us.

[>>More](#)

## MEMBER STORIES

### [Pacific Community Resources Society](#)

by Zarina Mulla, Social Planner, DPP

Two desks, four chairs, a computer, printer and a phone, several busy schedules and posters on the wall... and not enough room to swing a cat. But this active little office is the hub of an impressive program addressing problematic substance use among youth.

[>> More](#)

## Canada's Drug Strategy

by Richard Garlick, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse  
OTTAWA —The long-awaited renewal of Canada's Drug Strategy (CDS) was all but ignored in the media frenzy that greeted the federal government's simultaneous call for new cannabis laws last May. Now that the marijuana issue has cooled slightly—proposed reforms (now called Bill C-10) were re-introduced in Parliament with little fanfare on February 12—there is a fresh opportunity to focus on the CDS and what it is supposed to accomplish.

>> [Read more](#)

### HOW ARE WE DOING?

This is the third issue of the Four Pillars News. To help us improve the newsletter and serve you better, we'd like to hear from you about how we're doing.

>> [More](#)

## News in Brief

- Vancouver Drug Overdose Deaths - 2001 to 2003
- City's prevention planning moves forward in 2004

>> [Read more](#)

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### FOCUS ON ... HARM REDUCTION

## Vancouver Chosen as Site of 2006 International Harm Reduction Conference

by Donald MacPherson, Drug Policy Coordinator, City of Vancouver

The BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS has been successful in winning the bid to host the 17th International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm, to be held April 30 to May 4, 2006 in Vancouver.

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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

### Clinical trial to test new treatment for heroin addicts

By Jim Boothroyd , Communications Manager, Centre for Health Evaluation and Outcomes Science at UBC/St. Paul's Hospital

Researchers hope to begin a long-awaited clinical trial of a new treatment for people with severe cases of heroin addiction at a clinic in the Downtown Eastside this September.

The Vancouver site of the North American Opiate Medications Initiative (NAOMI) will provide injectable pharmaceutical-grade heroin to 88 injection drug users (IDUs) and methadone to 70 IDUs. The 21-month study is also being conducted in Toronto and Montreal, and will test whether heroin is more effective than methadone in helping chronic users who are not responding to conventional treatment options.

The study is sponsored by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The principal investigator is Dr. Martin Schechter, head of the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of British Columbia.

NAOMI's 158 Vancouver participants will be established residents of the Downtown Eastside who are chronic injection drug users and interested in beginning the recovery process, despite previous unsuccessful efforts to control their drug use.

Those assigned to receive heroin will come to the clinic up to three times a day, seven days a week. Here, they will receive prescribed doses under the direct supervision of a physician who specializes in addictions. After this, they will be asked to wait for 30 minutes before leaving the site. Once their dosages are fixed, those in the methadone group will come to the clinic once a week to get their prescribed treatment.

A social worker, a drug and addiction counselor, and other social supports will also be available to help participants achieve a more stable lifestyle--and begin recovering. At the end of the study, there will be a three-month transition period in which participants will be connected to existing detox, methadone and health services.

NAOMI is the first study of its kind in North America; however, results from similar trials in Switzerland and the Netherlands indicate that a significant percentage of those on prescribed heroin improve their health and their lives and reduce their addictions. Many enter abstinence programs; some find employment. European data also show that criminal activity among participants on heroin maintenance plummets. Results such as these prompted Swiss voters to choose -- in two referendums -- to continue heroin maintenance as a permanent program.

The proposed site of NAOMI is at 404 Abbott Street (on the corner of Hastings). It was chosen after a two-year search involving more than 40 locations. In December, study staff consulted with representatives of businesses and communities near the proposed site before applying for a development permit.

"People in the Downtown Eastside understand the terrible toll--human, social and fiscal--of chronic heroin addiction," says Dr. Schechter. "They also understand the need to test new treatments and innovative methods of reducing drug-related harm."

NAOMI won CIHR support more than two years ago, but the project has been delayed by logistical problems and the search for clinical sites. City officials will rule on its permit application in March. 🌈

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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

# Canada's Drug Strategy: emerging from the shadow of marijuana reform

by Richard Garlick, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief  
Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

OTTAWA —The long-awaited renewal of Canada's Drug Strategy (CDS) was all but ignored in the media frenzy that greeted the federal government's simultaneous call for new cannabis laws last May. Now that the marijuana issue has cooled slightly—proposed reforms (now called Bill C-10) were re-introduced in Parliament with little fanfare on February 12—there is a fresh opportunity to focus on the CDS and what it is supposed to accomplish.

The aim of the \$245-million, five-year strategy is to have Canadians "living in a society increasingly free of the harms associated with substance abuse". Adopting the Four Pillars approach, the CDS has set several key objectives that include increasing the age of first-time drug use and decreasing the prevalence of harmful use.

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) is working with Health Canada to develop a "national framework for action to address substance use and abuse" involving federal, provincial and non-governmental partners. Activities set to continue or begin in coming months include:


- Development of national agendas for research, prevention and policy. Strategic directions for a research agenda were proposed at a forum co-hosted by CCSA in October 2003.
- A consultation process involving five regional roundtables set for April-June. The goal is to start to identify priorities, guiding principles, and roles for all partners within the "national framework for action".
- The first in a series of biennial forums on addictions, to be held in December 2004. The regional roundtables will feed directly into this event where the proposed "national framework" will be discussed.



Members of an informal "all-party drug caucus committee" recently attended a briefing on Canada's renewed drug strategy hosted by (left to right) Michel Perron, CCSA's Chief Executive Officer; Paddy Torsney, Member of Parliament for Burlington, ON, and chair of the former Special House Committee on Non-Medical Use of Drugs; and Patricia Begin, CCSA's Director of Policy and Research.

- Launch of a Drug Strategy Community Initiatives Fund (DSCIF). First-year funding of \$3 million has been earmarked for strategic initiatives in collaboration with provinces and territories.
- Publication of a "state of substance abuse" report in November 2004. This key document will provide parliamentarians, policy makers and the media with an annual "snapshot" of addictions in Canada , and will highlight areas where more knowledge or attention is needed. CCSA is asking interested individuals and organizations for their ideas and suggestions about the nature and scope of the report.

Several other CDS-related activities are already well under way, including a national adult prevalence study that will provide the first in-depth look at Canadians' use of alcohol and drugs since 1994, a survey of the addictions treatment workforce, and a research project to update CCSA's 1996 milestone report on the costs of substance abuse in Canada . Also in progress is a plan for working with the provinces to standardize student drug-use surveys.

For more information on the CCSA and its work, go to our website at [www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca) 

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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

### VCH's Methamphetamine Response Committee

by Jennifer Vornbrock, Chair, MARC Treatment & Prevention Working Group  
Vancouver Coastal Health

Methamphetamine, or crystal meth as it is commonly called (also *ice*, *jib*, *crystal*, *meth*, or *speed*), is a synthetic stimulant. It appears as powder or granules that can be smoked, snorted, ingested or injected. The effects resemble cocaine, but methamphetamine is metabolized much more slowly, so effects may last up to 24 hours. Its distinguishing effects include increased energy, increased heart rate, euphoria, and diminished sleep and appetite. By current reported street prices, a habit could be maintained for less than \$5 per day.

The drug initially came to prominence as a recreational drug for parties in the rave and club scene, but has since spread to mainstream use across social strata, from high school youth to professionals. Youth (particularly street youth) and the lesbian/bisexual/gay/transgendered population appear to be at greatest risk for problematic use.


Methamphetamine is very addictive, and problematic use is often characterized by binges that can last several days. Immediate dangers of the drug include elevated blood pressure and risk of stroke. After-effects include anxiety, depression, and mental confusion, while withdrawal symptoms may include extreme irritability, loss of energy, depression, fearfulness, sleeping problems, and heart palpitations. As for long-term effects, users face memory loss, impaired ability to complete complex tasks, movement disorders, suicidal tendencies and permanent psychotic symptoms. Anecdotal evidence reveals a tendency in users for paranoia and violent behaviour.

In February 2003, the Methamphetamine Response Committee (MARC) was created by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH). MARC is comprised of numerous community and civic agencies in Vancouver. The MARC Treatment and Prevention Working Group, chaired by VCH, has been working hard to address the most pressing harms related to methamphetamine. Projects to date include increased education and prevention, including peer-to-peer education, community awareness and professional training and development for staff that work with street youth. The group continues to pursue opportunities for enhanced treatment services and ensure the integration between mental health and addiction services.

VCH recognizes that there is a need for prevention, education and treatment services for youth for overall substance use issues. The addiction services system in the past has been crisis-oriented, as opposed to being responsive to clients' needs.

Efforts should be directed at empowering methamphetamine users to make safer, healthier choices, and enable individuals to address underlying factors that perpetuate problematic substance use. These factors include trauma, abuse,

poverty, homelessness, depression and other linked mental health concerns.

For more information about MARC, please feel free to contact me at [jennifer.vornbrock@vch.ca](mailto:jennifer.vornbrock@vch.ca). 

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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

### Addictions services redesign at VCH

By Naomi Brunemeyer, Regional Communications Officer  
Vancouver Coastal Health

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) is in the process of redesigning addiction services, for which it assumed management in 1999. The redesign process is built on a number of community consultations and documents outlining gaps in addiction services and proposed programs to address the gaps. The traditional model of addiction services was described as fragmented, lacking easy access and limited in the range of treatment and prevention options. The proposed new model of care will increase access and provide a more effective, timely and appropriate quality of service.

The first focus of the redesign was on withdrawal management services (detox), the goal of which was to increase access and broaden services offered to better match clients' needs with appropriate services. Our new withdrawal management system provides a range of detox services including: residential services, home detox and an intensive outpatient day program. The implementation of a single point of access to detox services increased the occupancy rate of detox beds to over 95 per cent.


Building on the redesign of detox services, the second phase of the addictions redesign focuses on the addictions teams located at our community health centres (CHCs), which currently each offer different addictions services. VCH is in the process of implementing the same five core addiction services at every CHC:

- **Needle Exchange** -- provides needles and injection equipment and helps ensure the recovery and safe disposal of needles. Needle exchange is both anonymous and confidential.
- **Counselling** -- therapy, support education, outreach and advocacy for adults, youth, families and groups.
- **Prevention for Youth** -- prevention services for youth including short term counselling and support, education and referrals in the community.
- **Home Detox** -- nursing support provided to people who are able to live at home or be in another safe environment during withdrawal for substances (detox does not occur on site, only nursing assessment on site).
- **Methadone Maintenance** -- prescription for methadone in conjunction with counselling (methadone is not available on site but dispensed at local pharmacies).

Implementation of the five addiction services has been completed at Evergreen Community Health Centre (3425 Crowley Drive ), Raven Song Community Health

Centre (2450 Ontario Street), and Pacific Spirit Community Health Centre (2110 West 43rd Avenue). Pender Community Health Centre (59 West Pender), North Community Health Office (1651 Commercial Drive) and Three Bridges Community Health Centre (1292 Hornby) are expected to be completed by March 31, 2004. Remaining sites include the Downtown Community Health Centre (569 Powell Street) and the South Community Health Office (6405 Knight Street) and will also be involved in the redesign.

This phase of the addictions redesign provides many opportunities including access to addiction services where people live and further integration between addiction services, primary care and community health services to better serve clients needs.

Future plans will focus on other treatment services such as residential services and support recovery, greater collaboration with mental health and prevention services. 

<< [Back to Newsletter Home](#)



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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

### Improving prevention and treatment in Vancouver

By Larry Campbell, Mayor of Vancouver


The Forum on the prevention of problematic drug use held at the Wosk Centre for Dialogue on November 20 and 21, 2003 marked the beginning of a new challenge for all of us. Titled *Visioning the Future for Prevention: A Local Perspective*, it was a first opportunity for the Four Pillars Coalition to bring together a diverse group of citizens and local and international experts to participate in a dialogue on the prevention of problematic drug use.

*Visioning the Future for Prevention* was a chance to step back and consider problematic substance use from a broader societal perspective, and to work towards developing an overall prevention strategy for Vancouver. We know from experience that the issues of problematic drug use, addiction, and mental health are complex and cannot be solved by any one group or level of government. Prevention efforts require a strong commitment, leadership and involvement by the whole community.

As a community, the challenge ahead is to address many of the fundamental questions that were raised at prevention forum. Some of these questions challenge the way we approach prevention today, others challenge us to work better together at every level of government, and still others challenge everyone in the community -- including those in government -- to act immediately to support individuals and organizations across the city in reducing drug-related harm.

A vital piece of the harm reduction puzzle is improving treatment for those addicted to psychoactive substances. Our partner in the Four Pillars Drug Strategy, Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) is currently working on a redesign of its addictions services to improve the effectiveness of service delivery (see [Naomi Brunemeyer's article](#) on this topic in this edition of the *Four Pillars News*). While they're doing a good job with the resources they have, it's also clear that more resources are desperately needed to expand the range and scope of addictions treatment.

With the appointment of Dr. David Marsh, formerly of the Toronto-based Centre for Addiction Medicine and Mental Health, to coordinate VCH's drug and alcohol treatment programs, it's likely that treatment will play an even more central role. To that end, I will be convening a Four Pillars Coalition meeting later this spring that will focus largely on treatment. Details on the meeting will be released shortly.

I look forward to working with VCH and our other Four Pillars partners to urge the provincial and federal governments to provide the additional funding and services Vancouver needs to make our treatment services the best in the country. 

Contact Mayor Campbell at [larry\\_campbell@city.vancouver.bc.ca](mailto:larry_campbell@city.vancouver.bc.ca).

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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

### **Pacific Community Resources Society**


by Zarina Mulla, Social Planner, Drug Policy Program  
City of Vancouver

Two desks, four chairs, a computer, printer and a phone, several busy schedules and posters on the wall...and not enough room to swing a cat. But this active little office is the hub of an impressive program addressing problematic substance use among youth. D.E.W.Y. (day, evening, weekend for youth) is a treatment service from Pacific Community Resources, aiming to assist youth make informed decisions towards reducing or abstaining from substance use.

Tom Hetherington, Manager of Addictions Services and Isaac Heyes, Youth Counsellor gave me a fast-paced, verbal tour of a couple of the 25 programs run by Pacific Community Resources, and shared some insights on related issues. "D.E.W.Y started four years ago," explains Heyes. "It offers 35 hours of core and optional programming per week. The youth are referred by alcohol and drug service providers and are expected to attend at least three sessions per week for ten to twelve weeks." The programming incorporates a wide range of subjects which include courses on goal setting, drug education, group work, life skills, art, recreation and peer leadership training.

In the pipeline is yet another innovative and unique program - a harm reduction group for cannabis smokers. This program will focus on cannabis using youth interested in learning about the risks from its use, thereby "...helping them bring their pot use under control," explains Hetherington. A self-assessment tool, in the form of a questionnaire, is designed to assist the youth in identifying their cannabis use and its relation to their quality of life, through indicators such as family, friends, physical/mental/emotional health, education, employment, housing and the law. This assessment would provide young people with a systematic list of benefits and risks of their cannabis use, and as an option, the means to reduce or abstain from it. Abstinence would be encouraged, but is not the main criteria for seeking entrance to this program.

On the subject of drug policy, Hetherington is interested in the Four Pillars approach, because he believes "...that this is what ought to happen...I think we (the Four Pillars Coalition) are on the same team, intuitively and professionally." However, the major challenges ahead for Vancouver's drug policy, "...lie in societal attitudes...and how the City's drug policy can strike a balance between continuing to develop cutting edge solutions to drug problems while making sure the people are following".

For more information on the Pacific Community Resources Society, visit their website at [www.pcrs.ca](http://www.pcrs.ca) or contact Tom Hetherington at 604-951-4823 or Isaac Heyes at 604-517-5916. 

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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

### News in Brief

#### City's prevention planning moves forward in 2004

by Lesli Boldt, Corporate Communications

Building on the success of last November's Prevention Symposium, the City of Vancouver's Drug Policy Program is moving forward in 2004 with a process to develop a comprehensive prevention strategy for the City of Vancouver.

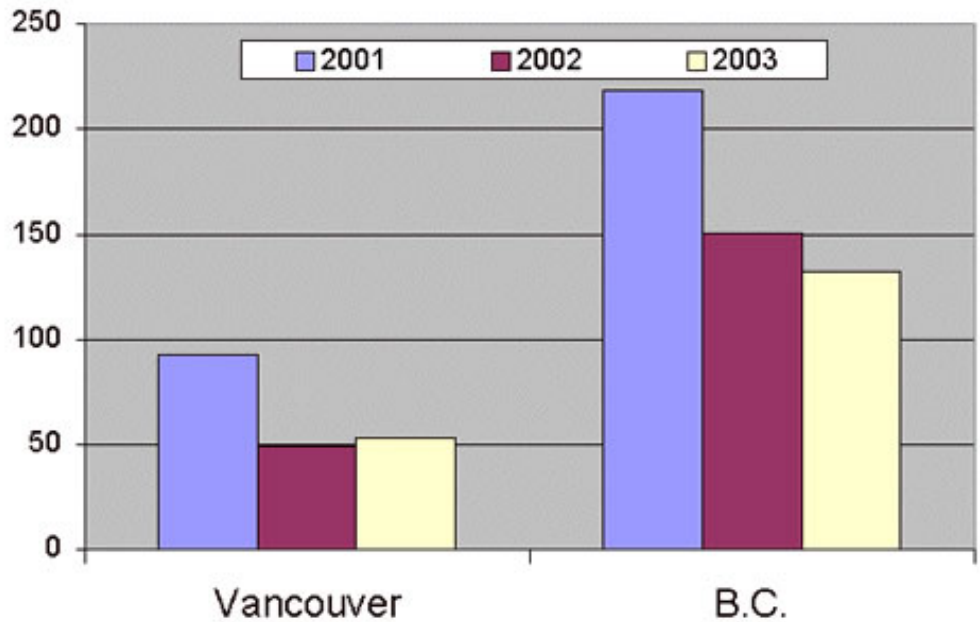
The City of Vancouver's Drug Policy Program will continue the dialogue on preventing problematic substance abuse at the community level in the months and weeks ahead. As a starting point for this dialogue, the Drug Policy Program will release a report on the symposium, *A Dialogue on the Prevention of Problematic Drug Use*, in early March.

Creating a strategy for Vancouver that focuses on problematic drug use will be the subject of community meetings that will take place throughout the city between March and June 2004. These meetings will allow citizens from across Vancouver to participate in determining the key elements of a prevention strategy - elements that will be relevant and effective for their communities. The City's intent is to involve all sectors of the broader community in this discussion.

A draft prevention strategy for the City of Vancouver will be released in the fall of 2004. Information on upcoming meetings will be made available on the City of Vancouver's Four Pillars website in the coming weeks, at [www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars](http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars).

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### Vancouver Drug Overdose Deaths, 2001-2003



*Source: BC Coroner's Service, January 2004*

For the City of Vancouver, the total number of drug overdose deaths from January to December 2003 (53 deaths) is slightly higher than for January to December 2002 (49 deaths). Nevertheless, these numbers are a sharp drop from the number of drug overdose deaths from January to December 2001. Over all regions, the number of drug overdose deaths from January to December 2003 (163 deaths) is down slightly from 167 deaths between January to December 2002, and a significant drop from the 2001 numbers (247 deaths).

The numbers indicate that injection drug use overdoses, while declining, are still a serious challenge for the City of Vancouver and health care providers. These trends support the ongoing implementation of the Four Pillars Drug Strategy. 🌈

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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

### How are we doing?

The *Four Pillars News* is designed to provide members of Vancouver's Four Pillars Coalition and other interested individuals and organizations with up-to-date and relevant information on Vancouver's Four Pillars Drug Strategy. We also want to help keep you informed about what's happening in drug policy across Canada and around the world.

This is the third issue of the *Four Pillars News*. To help us improve the newsletter and serve you better, we'd like to hear from you about how we're doing:

- Do you like our newsletter? Anything you'd like to see improved? Anything you don't like?
- Is the information in our newsletter interesting and relevant to you? Are there topics you'd like us to cover that we haven't touched on yet?
- Should we add any news sections (for example, letters to the editor)?

Don't hold back -- share your comments and suggestions to us at [fourpillars@city.vancouver.bc.ca](mailto:fourpillars@city.vancouver.bc.ca). We look forward to hearing from you. 🌈

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## FOUR PILLARS NEWS

# Vancouver Chosen as Site of International Conference on Reduction of Drug Related Harm

By Donald MacPherson, Drug Policy Coordinator  
City of Vancouver

The BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS has been successful in winning the bid to host the 17th International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm, to be held April 30 to May 4, 2006 in Vancouver.

This conference will be a significant event for the city, and will bring a host of international experts on harm reduction to our community. It will also provide us with an excellent opportunity to measure our progress on reducing and preventing drug-related harm, in light of international experience and best practice from around the globe.

The International Harm Reduction Association (IHRA) works with local, national and international organizations to assist individuals and communities in the areas of public health advocacy, collaboration and communication, best practice and education, and training and research. The 2006 Conference will take place at both the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver and the Hyatt Regency in Downtown Vancouver.

This conference will be of interest to a diverse array of people interested in harm reduction, including: current and former participants in harm reduction programs, doctors, nurses, educators, peer support people, academics, front-line workers, police officers, enforcement agencies, corrections workers, policy makers, lawyers and human rights activists.

The 2006 Conference will also provide an environment for harm reduction program participants, advocates, programs and governments to develop realistic responses and effective harm reduction strategies. It will provide a forum for global perspectives in fostering local innovation, collaboration and cross-cultural understanding, and will create opportunities for an honest exchange of information past and current challenges that will help direct future efforts.

Information on this conference will be posted on the Four Pillars website in the months ahead at [www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars](http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars), and a dedicated conference website will be online in the near future. For more information on the International Harm Reduction Association, check their website at [www.ihra.net](http://www.ihra.net).



Donald MacPherson, Drug Policy Coordinator

Photo credit: Joshua Berson

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