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To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)
Date: 8/27/2021 12:52:12 PM
Subject: [Upcoming IB: City calls on residents to fight substance-use stigma this International Overdose Awareness Day \(Aug 30\)](#)

Dear Mayor and Council,

I am writing to inform you that the City will be issuing the below news release on Monday, August 30, in advance of International Overdose Awareness Day on Tuesday, August 31. **Please keep this information bulletin embargoed until it goes live from the City media email account at approximately 10:00 AM on Monday, August 30th.**

The release includes recent actions the City has taken to end substance-use stigma and discrimination, and a list of resources residents can use to fight stigma in their own communities. There will be corresponding social media posts on August 30th and 31st, on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, and I encourage you to share them as well.

All the best,
Karen

Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager (she/her)
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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm/Musqueam, Skwəwú7mesh/Squamish and səilwataʔ/Tsleil-Waututh nations.

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City of Vancouver
News release
August 30, 2021

City calls on residents to fight substance-use stigma this International Overdose Awareness Day

Tomorrow is International Overdose Awareness Day and 2021 is on track to be the deadliest year for overdose deaths since the Province declared a public health emergency in 2016. The City of Vancouver mourns the lost loved ones who are victims of the toxic drug supply, and asks everyone in Vancouver to take action to end stigma against people who use substances.

Stigma is the negative judgment that leads to discrimination against a person or group of people based on a circumstance, action, or trait. Substance-use stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs can prevent people from seeking health care, treatment, or other life-saving supports and services. These are common reasons why people use alone, a leading factor in overdose deaths. In addition, the criminalization of drug use contributes to stigma and furthers the notion that people who use drugs are criminals, rather than understanding drug use as a public health issue.

"The overdose crisis continues to claim the lives of our family, friends, loved ones, and neighbours in every neighbourhood, no matter the income, gender, age, or background. This is not something

happening to 'other' people – it's happening to all of us," said Mayor Kennedy Stewart. "That's why the City continues to invest in strategies that reduce stigma and increase access to harm reduction. That's why we've worked to secure the country's first Health Canada exemption to decriminalize simple possession. And that's why we call again on senior governments to rapidly expand access to life-saving safe supply."

The overdose crisis affects people of all ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. However, the overdose crisis disproportionately affects Indigenous community members living and working in the Downtown Eastside. This is due to the ongoing impacts of colonization, including systemic racism and discrimination, which is further exacerbated by intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools, the child welfare Sixties Scoop and other historically racist government policies designed to eliminate Indigenous culture. Indigenous-led initiatives, like the Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society (WAHRS), are essential in saving lives during the overdose crisis.

"WAHRS does outreach, and it's not just about handing out supplies and resources, it's about connection," said Elli Lynn Taylor, Board Member, and Tracey Draper, Program Coordinator with WAHRS. "The medicine that we give is connection. Connection to our people. The people we serve are our equals, brothers, sisters, our teachers, and we honour their experience. That is why we are here."

The City is deeply grateful to all Indigenous and other community organizations who are doing meaningful work advocating for drug policy reform and supporting those impacted by overdose, and is committed to investing in these essential supports.

Recent work the City has done to reduce stigma and discrimination

□ "Our Park Project" at Andy Livingstone Park

The City collaborated with Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), WAHRS, Vancouver Parks and Recreation, cultural and peer support organizations in the Downtown Eastside area, people who use substances and are precariously housed, and local families to create the "[Our Park Project](#)" at Andy Livingstone Park.

The project aims to reduce stigma related to substance use by facilitating creative activities that bring together the diverse communities that use Andy Livingstone Park. Elder Les Nelson, Carnegie's first Elder in residence, leads the project with artist Sylvan Hamburger. The project offers free public arts events in the park, including screen printing and drawing. The project launched in mid-July and will run until September 12.

□ The Vancouver Community Action Team

The City understands that for drug policy to be effective, people who use drugs need to be involved at all levels. One way the City engages people with lived experience is by co-chairing the Vancouver Community Action Team (CAT) with Vancouver Coastal Health. The CAT represents approximately 25 organizations and people who use drugs who are working on or are affected by the drug poisoning crisis. The CAT works to destigmatize substance use, advocate for safe supply and changes to drug policy, raise awareness of the crisis, and more.

□ Decriminalization of simple possession

In May of this year, with a central goal of reducing the stigmatization and marginalization of people who use substances, the City submitted the [final proposal to Health Canada](#) requesting an exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) under the provision of section 56(1).

If approved, when a person is found to have illicit substances under a certain threshold amount within Vancouver city limits, they will not be subject to criminal sanctions. Additionally, their drugs will not be confiscated, and they will have the option of being referred to health services. The proposed model is a starting point that will remain open to evaluation and be guided by ongoing engagement with people who use drugs and our partners in health and community services, including the CAT.

The City continues to work with Health Canada, Vancouver Coastal Health, the Vancouver Police Department, and community partners on this initiative. [Visit our webpage for more information](#) about the decriminalization of simple possession.

Vancouver has long been at the forefront of innovative approaches to addressing substance use, [including safe supply](#), overdose prevention and harm reduction, treatment, outreach, housing, and Indigenous healing and wellness. [Visit the City's website](#) to learn more about the City's approach to the overdose crisis.

Help end substance-use stigma and discrimination

Combatting stigma and discrimination requires participation from citizens as well as government. Help end stigma and discrimination in your community by using the resources below:

- [Attend an "Our Park Project" event](#) at Andy Livingstone Park and create new community connections. Events run Wednesdays and Sundays from 2 to 6 p.m. until September 12.
- Learn how to reverse an overdose [with this video by WAHRS](#), and visit this site to [get your own take-home naloxone kit](#).
- Language matters. Read the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control's '[Respectful Language and Substance Use](#)' guide to ensure the language you're using isn't harmful to people who use substances.
- [Visit VCH's website to learn about overdose prevention and response](#) in Vancouver, which includes educational resources, overdose data, and a map of supervised consumption and overdose prevention services.
- [Read this article by Dr. Evan Adams](#), Chief Medical Officer for the First Nations Health Authority, which discusses how substance use is a health issue, not a moral issue.
- [Watch and share this video](#) from the Government of Canada about the harmful impacts of stigma against substance users. Visit [their web page on stigma](#) for more information.
- [Learn why inclusion is a vital part of a health-centred approach](#) to ending the overdose crisis with these resources from Here to Help BC.

The City calls on all residents to combat the stigma surrounding substance use, raise awareness of overdose-related harms, and to share our [video advocating for safe supply](#).