

From: ["Mochrie, Paul" <Paul.Mochrie@vancouver.ca>](mailto:Paul.Mochrie@vancouver.ca)

To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)

Date: 6/13/2022 3:18:50 PM

Subject: [Council Memo - Saving Lives with the Community Led Compassion Club Model for Safer Tested Drugs - RTS #15176](#)

Attachments: [ACCS - GM - Memo \(Council\) - Safe Supply Motion Progress Update - RTS #15176 \(2022-06-08\).pdf](#)

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Dear Mayor and Council,

The attached memo from Sandra Singh, General Manager of Arts, Culture, and Community Services, provides an update on the City's role in the development of a Safe Supply Strategy for Vancouver. Highlights include:

- Visual representation of annual overdose death projections for Vancouver in 2022
- A short description of the current medical model for accessing safe supply and related shortcomings
- Description of completed and forthcoming work to identify the City's role in supporting both improved access to a medical model of safe supply and community-led models not reliant on prescribers
- Timeline for finalization of the Strategy and a report to Council

Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Sandra directly via [sandra.singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:sandra.singh@vancouver.ca) and she will ensure responses are provided through the weekly Q&A.

Best,  
Paul

**Paul Mochrie** (he/him)  
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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the x̱m̱əθḵʷəy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətəł (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

## MEMORANDUM

June 8, 2022

TO: Mayor & Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager  
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager  
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager  
Lynda Graves, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office  
Maria Pontikis, Director, Civic Engagement and Communications  
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk  
Anita Zaenker, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Neil Monckton, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Alvin Singh, Communications Director, Mayor's Office

FROM: Sandra Singh, General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Saving Lives with the Community Led Compassion Club Model for Safer Tested Drugs

RTS #: 15176

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### PURPOSE

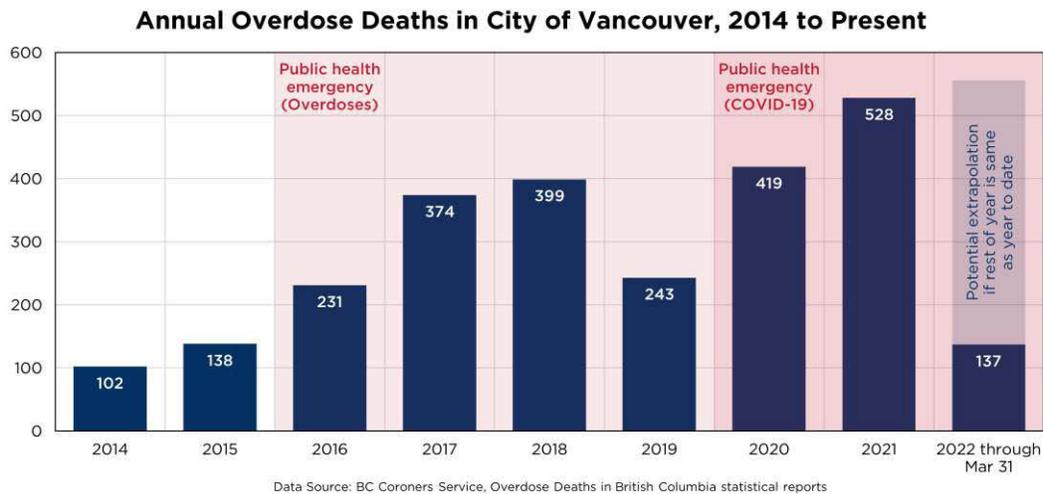
The purpose of this memo is to provide a progress update on the creation of a Safe Supply Strategy based on a motion approved by Council on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 as part of the City's role in supporting access to safe supply through community-led compassion clubs. As per the Council approved motion, the purpose of the strategy is to identify options for multiple routes to accessing safe supply.

### BACKGROUND

Over half a decade ago, BC's Provincial Health Officer declared a public health emergency in reaction to alarmingly high numbers of fatal drug overdoses. Within the context of COVID-19, there is a large population of people who use drugs (PWUD) who now face compounded risks from two public health emergencies. Since the onset of the pandemic, PWUD are not only navigating new gaps in the resources and supports on which they rely, but also significant changes in the drug supply, increasing their risk of overdose. As of March 2022, despite coordinated provincial, municipal and community efforts to date, the BC Coroners Service indicates that over 2,331 people have died from preventable drug-related deaths in Vancouver since 2016. These data suggest that annual overdose deaths this year will surpass those of

2021, making 2022 the deadliest year yet, unless critical intervention and policy change occur (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1. 2022: A Critical Year to Address the Worsening Overdose Crisis



A range of community-based organizations, such as drug user-led groups and local non-profits are seeking to save lives and inform the development of drug policy locally, provincially and at national levels – however, their capacity to do so is restricted given the immediate crisis, and the fear and grief from loss of life that PWUD and their loved ones and communities face.

In the October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 motion Council endorsed the following:

- a) THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Vancouver City Council endorse the application of the Drug Users Liberation Front (DULF) and the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) for a federal section 56 exemption for a compassion club model to supply safer drugs to people who use drugs, and who are over 18 years old;
- b) FURTHER THAT Council ask the Mayor to write to the federal government endorsing the DULF/VANDU application;
- c) AND FURTHER THAT Vancouver City Council direct staff to report back as quickly as possible with a strategy on creating multiple routes to safe supply, including appealing to the provincial government to amend the Pharmacy Operations and Drug Scheduling Act and the Health Professions Act and other legislation as necessary, and ways that the City can provide concrete action through tools available in the Vancouver Charter.

Given the provision of safe supply is within the jurisdiction of senior levels of government, priority actions falling under the mandates of provincial or federal governments will also be identified along with recommendations for advocacy and/or partnerships. It is preferable to determine not just the City's role in enabling multiple routes to safe supply, but also, to support community capacity building through integrated connections between sectors/levels of government.

## Overview of Work to Date

### *Background*

Several approaches to safe supply have been proposed in Canada. So far, safe supply has been provided in a limited way through a medical model where a person needs to obtain a prescription for a regulated substance from a healthcare provider. This is because a prescription is the only legal way to access many substances with mind/body altering effects. However, as identified by DULF and VANDU in their presentation to council, and through emergent research, approaches that rely solely on a medical model create barriers (e.g., rigid protocols, limited clinical capacity, including the reluctance among doctors to prescribe, and pharmacists to dispense – which are associated with the medical profession’s stigma related to drug use) and are thus unable to meet the needs of all PWUD. The current review explores options for the City’s role in supporting both improved access to a medical model of safe supply and community-led models not reliant on prescribers.

### *Progress*

Staff procured Bunyaad Public Affairs to support the following work, which is completed or in progress:

#### *Literature Review – Complete*

The first tier of searches focused on opioid-related safe supply programs (including heroin). The second tier explored safe supply for other substances, e.g., compassion clubs for cannabis, managed alcohol programs, etc., with a focus on reviews of existing literature as there has not been a lot written on the subject. In all cases the searches were conducted with a focus on the role of municipalities / local governments.

#### *Jurisdictional Scan – Complete*

The jurisdictional scan identifies existing government policies, programs or services aimed at supporting access to safe supply, in particular, community-led models, elsewhere in Canada. The scan was only able to identify prescriber based models for opioid safe supply. The review found 21 safe supply programs currently operating in BC, ON and NB. Most programs began in 2021, so little published literature is available. From the written material, it is not always apparent how peers are engaged, or what role the City might be playing (given jurisdiction is typically provincial/federal). Given limited models, the jurisdictional scan also focused on gaining a better understanding of what a compassion club model could look like, and what the City’s role would be in creating an enabling environment (e.g. what are the core elements of such a model?).

#### *Focus Groups – In Progress*

Two focus groups were conducted in April and one in May. The first, with a group of Indigenous peers (e.g., who use substances, access safe supply and/or have been affected negatively by the overdose crisis), the second with a group of peers from the Vancouver Community Action Team and the third with VANDU. There are two additional focus groups planned for the month of June.

### *Key Informant Interviews – In Progress*

These interviews are underway and include staff from VCH, local researchers via SFU/ UBC /BCCSU, legal advocates, peer advocates and non-profit partners.

### *Survey – In Progress*

A survey instrument has been developed and will be disseminated to both PWUD and who access safe supply, as well as non-profit partners who work frontline responding to the overdose crisis.

### *Related Work*

As per a November 2019 council motion, staff will begin a comprehensive review of “A Framework for Action: A Four-Pillar Approach to Drug Problems in Vancouver” in June 2022. This review will identify opportunities for new drug policy, and “new to Vancouver” initiatives, in alignment with the original spirit of the framework and the Healthy City Strategy. Staff will report back to Council in Q1 of 2023.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Focus groups and interviews will continue through June/July 2022. In addition the Community Action Team is hosting a Youth Forum and a Safe Supply Conference in June (with funding support from the EQUIP Pathways Project at UBC, a research based initiative to address substance use stigma).

Upon completion of the data collection phase, staff will summarize what we heard/learned and convene a community report back to co-create a set of recommendations for internal review that will take place in the fall.

Staff will engage VCH and the VPD for feedback and endorsement, following which a set of finalized recommendations for Council will be prepared that include a set of strategic advocacy actions that the City can take. Staff will report back to Council in Q1 2023.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

If Council requires further information, please feel free to contact me directly at [sandra.singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:sandra.singh@vancouver.ca) and we will provide response through the weekly Council Q&A.



Sandra Singh, General Manager  
Arts, Culture, and Community Services

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