

MEMORANDUM

May 13, 2019

TO: Mayor and Council

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FROM: Sandra Singh, General Manager, ACCS

SUBJECT: Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force Update

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to provide a first quarter 2019 update on the implementation of the Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force recommendations.

SUMMARY

Vancouver continues to be at the epicentre of a public health emergency caused by a poisoned drug supply. Yearly data to date (Jan - May) indicate Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services have responded to an average of 124 emergency calls per week relating to overdoses, compared to a weekly average of 101 in 2018. In 2017 and 2018, there was more than one overdose death per day in Vancouver, with 376 deaths in 2017 and 387 in 2018. City staff estimate that at least 84 overdose deaths have taken place in Vancouver in 2019 to date, a number that will increase as future coroner's reports become available.

In response to this crisis, the Mayor launched a Task Force in December 2018, resulting in many recommendations to save lives and prevent overdose deaths. In the Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force report, approved by Council in December 2018, over 30 actions were approved by Council. Of the 31 total actions, 24 are in progress and on track, 6 are complete, and 1 has been delayed. Each of the actions is underway and, overall, staff are on track. In addition to these immediate actions, significant systemic changes are needed to address the overdose crisis and prevent continued drug poisonings and deaths.

BACKGROUND

The newly elected Mayor and Council directed a Task Force in November that was comprised of the existing Community Action Team and additional members. In December 2018, Council unanimously approved over 30 recommendations in the Mayor's Report, approximately half of which direct requests to senior governments for funding and/or leadership (see Appendix B for a table summarizing the funding requests). The other half identify commitments from the City to fund non-profit initiatives, enable sites for various projects, engage in research and knowledge gathering, lead collaborative initiatives, and communicate to the public on the overdose emergency.

The commitments from the City will be carried out between Q1 and Q4 of 2019 and are overseen by City staff in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health, Indigenous organizations, community organizations, and people with lived experience of substance use. Vancouver Coastal Health will continue to be a lead advisor in this work and the Vancouver CAT will continue to be engaged through regular partnership meetings.

DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force

A comprehensive 2019 work plan has been developed to monitor ongoing activities and roles, with regular meetings with the Vancouver CAT, VCH, and the Vancouver Police Department (VPD). The recommended 31 actions have been grouped into categories:

- I. **Senior Government Partnerships** - (4 actions) Requests to the Provincial and Federal government for funding and leadership on a range of issues related to the overdose crisis.
- II. **Granting Initiatives** - (9 actions) City grants awarded to non-profit organizations for expanding and developing community-based initiatives and responses to the crisis, as well as one grant to the VPD for a partnership-based approach to addressing gaps in access to treatment and harm reduction in the criminal justice system.
- III. **Site Identification for Overdose Prevention Facilities** - (4 actions) Identification of sites for harm reduction treatment and services.
- IV. **Research and Review** - (6 actions) Reviewing current documents and literature related to best practices in overdose response, reviewing policy to address gaps in overdose prevention and response, and engaging researchers in studies and initiatives related to harm reduction and treatment.
- V. **Collaborative Leadership** - (5 actions) Working in partnership to address gaps in the criminal justice system including VPD, as well as supportive employment programs.
- VI. **Communication** - (3 actions) Distribution of resources and information to the public related to the overdose crisis and substance use.

Vancouver Community Action Team (CAT) members - including peers and medical/public health experts - continue to meet regularly with the City and Vancouver Coastal Health to discuss priority areas for action, including drug policy, investments and advocacy. One key area of focus is to secure a safe supply of drugs, including both opioids and stimulants. Members of the CAT are interested in partnering with the City and other levels of government on safe supply models, for example heroin compassion clubs and low barrier distribution of prescription opioids. Vancouver Coastal Health is a lead partner in this work, and the City has an essential role to play in fostering strong partnerships that integrate the social determinants of mental health and substance use, including strategic initiatives in the areas of community economic development, urban Indigenous healing and wellness, reconciliation and Indigenous partnerships, and the Healthy City Strategy.

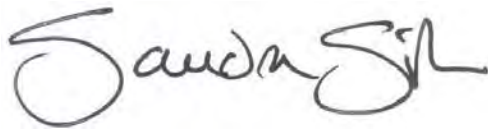
A full summary of the work to date in each of these categories is found in Appendix A.

SUMMARY OF NEXT STEPS

- 1) A Council Report with updates on Q1 and Q2 will be provided to Council in June.

FINAL REMARKS

The overall progress on implementation of the Task Force has been steady, with the majority of actions on-track and some completed. Many partnerships have been strengthened and established. Consultation with partners, including people with lived and living experience of substance use, will be maintained throughout the duration of implementation.



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Mayors Overdose Emergency Task Force - Council Memo - Apr 2019

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Appendix A: Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force Recommendations - Work to Date

I. Senior Government Partnerships

Summary:

Letters to Government Partners

Status: On Track - In Progress

Multiple provincial requests were summarized in one letter to Premier John Horgan and relevant Ministers with a request for funding and leadership on various issues related to the overdose crisis. Issues highlighted in letter from the Task Force Report include: safe supply, overdose services, urban Indigenous initiatives, peer support, support within SROs, treatment and recovery, community safety and inclusion. Two letters were written to the federal government: 1) to the Prime Minister and relevant Ministers requesting funding for urban Indigenous healing and wellness and peer employment programs; and, 2) to the Ministers responsible for public safety and security requesting policy changes to enable a safe supply.

Alternative Models for Issuing Social Assistance Cheques

Status: On Track - In Progress

In addition to the requests to senior government to address a number of issues, including exploring alternatives to issues social assistance cheques, staff are working with BCCSU on a study examining different models for social assistance. Dr. Lindsey Richardson shared a brief of this study sent to the Ministers of Social Development and Poverty Reduction and the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction with Mayor and Council on Friday, May 4, 2019. Staff are also engaged with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to seek income assistance innovation opportunities that are in alignment with the Poverty Reduction Plan in partnership with EMBERS Eastside Works low-barrier employment programs.

Safe Supply Statement

Status: On Track - In Progress

A safe supply statement was initially drafted with feedback incorporated from VCH and the VPD in January/February 2019, prioritizing a health response for safe supply for people with opioid use disorder. Additional process to include further discussion with drug users, and the Vancouver Community Action Team (CAT) in March/April 2019, requested a stronger decriminalization focus and the right for all people who use drugs, intermittently and regularly, to know the composition of what is purchased. A drug user working group provided additional feedback on the revised statement on Friday, April 26. Please see Appendix C for the draft statement.

Next Steps:

- Convene meetings with senior government partners.
- Finalize safe supply statement based on feedback from the peer working group.

II. Granting Initiatives

Summary:

Non-Profit Community Grants

Status: On Track - In Progress

Terms of Reference and Letters of Agreement are currently in preparation for 6 of the 7 grant recipients: Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council, Pacific Association of First Nations Women, Lookout Housing + Health Society, RainCity Housing, BC Centre for Substance Use, and Drawing Wisdom.

The Council recommendation for granting \$106,000 to the DTES SRO Collaborative Tenant Overdose Response Organizers (TORO) pilot will be brought back to Council in June 2019 for an amendment to better align with community readiness.

VPD Grant

Status: On Track - Complete

The VPD received a grant of \$100,000 to develop a pilot for addressing gaps in continuity of treatment for people who are engaged in the criminal justice system. This work will be informed by a Justice Working Group that is being convened for implementation of the Task Force recommendations. The Working Group is described in more detail in subsequent sections.

Next Steps:

- Grants will be dispersed in Q2.
- Council Action re: TORO will be brought to Council in Q2 for amendment.

III. Site Identification for Overdose Prevention Facilities

Summary:

Outdoor Inhalation Overdose Prevention Site (OPS)

Status: On Track - In Progress

A new location for the outdoor inhalation OPS is underway, although site identification is not an immediate urgency. VCH is working with City staff and BC Housing to find a new location for the indoor and outdoor OPS when the lease expires in 2020 at their current locations (58 E Hastings and 62 E Hastings respectively). Operational efficiencies and safety protocol require that the outdoor inhalation OPS be adjacent to the indoor OPS and new space will be required for both as BC Housing progresses plans for redevelopment of the sites.

Mobile OPS

Status: On Track - In Progress

A site for VCH's mobile Overdose Prevention Site (OPS) has been identified. This mobile service will be operated by the PHS Community Services Society in a neighbourhood outside

the Downtown Eastside. City staff has worked with VCH to identify a location area to pilot this new service based on a) the rates of overdose calls and deaths in the surrounding area and, b) its proximity to a community health centre where other services are available for people who use substances. City staff are working to provide power and water to the site, support regulatory processes, and lead communication with the local residents in partnership with VCH ahead of anticipated launch in May/June 2019. As this is a pilot approach to OPS expansion into neighbourhoods outside of the DTES, if successful, VCH plans to identify additional high risk neighbourhoods and locations. If this site is not successful, the OPS is mobile and can be moved to other sites for access piloting.

BCCDC Low Barrier Hydromorphone Dispersal Pilot

Status: On Track - Complete

The location for the BCCDC low barrier hydromorphone dispersal pilot has been tentatively identified as Powell St. Getaway and will be confirmed by VCH and BCCDC as the program operation planning is completed. Powell St. Getaway is operated by Lookout Housing and Health Society where a Safe Consumption Site operates alongside other mental health and substance use programs and services. The BCCDC project team is working to complete the ethics review and operations planning to initiate phase one of the low barrier hydromorphone dispersal pilot that would distribute the program in-person.

Kingsway Drop-in and OPS

Status: On Track - In Progress

The collection of data and information to inform the development of the Kingsway drop-in and OPS is underway, including: a) a survey for sex workers who work in the Kingsway corridor; b) an analysis of incident reports on overdoses or bad dates; and, c) analysis of potential appropriate sites. Importantly, Indigenous women who participated in the previous peer consultation in the Kingsway area identified a need for culturally safe and appropriate grief and loss supports as part of a cultural response to the overdose crisis.

Next Steps:

- Identify a new location for the outdoor inhalation OPS by Q3.
- Launch mobile OPS in Q2.
- Continue to seek possible locations for the Kingsway drop-in and OPS as part of overdose response and UN Scoping Study, Safe Cities for Women & Girls.
- Develop a scoping document from project operations.
- Interpret findings from Kingsway data to inform recommendations, developed by Q3.

IV. Research and Review

Summary:

Washroom Strategy

Status: On Track - In Progress

Several meetings with multiple partners have been convened in Q1 and an Overdose Washroom Strategy and Implementation Plan in development (See Appendix D). A core

working group has been established and consultation has occurred with internal consultants, first responders and community centre operators, and housing partners. The strategy objectives, scope, and plan for assessment has been developed and a technical team formed to do on-location risk assessments and draft recommendations for capital retrofit or programmatic initiatives (e.g. peer programs) for high risk locations for Q2 report back.

BCCSU Report Review

Status: Complete

Staff conducted a review of the BC Centre for Substance Use report, *Strategies to Strengthen Recovery in British Columbia: The Path Forward*. An analysis of the 39 recommendations revealed some considerations and next steps for working with partners to support treatment and recovery in Vancouver. A one-page summary of the analysis is included in Appendix E.

City By-Law Review

Status: On Track - Not started - Scheduled to begin Q2

The review of City policies and by-laws that marginalize and criminalize people who use drugs, will occur within two groups that have been convened for this Task Force: 1) the Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force drug user working group, whose role is to provide input on the implementation of the Task Force actions; and 2) a Justice Working Group that includes partners such as the VPD, drug treatment court, judicial representatives and people who use drugs, whose role is to identify and address gaps related to risk for overdose for people interacting with the criminal justice system.

Four Pillars Review

Status: On Track - Not started - Scheduled to begin in Q2 2019

The Four Pillars review will be conducted in partnership with the Justice Working Group described in the previous paragraph, which is currently being scheduled for Q2. The Community Action Team will also have opportunity to provide input.

Cannabis Study for Opioid Use

Status: On Track - In Progress

Conversations are underway between Dr. M-J Milloy, the founders of High Hopes Cannabis Dispensary (a non-profit social enterprise) and City Staff, including Social Policy, VPD, Legal, and Licensing. Milloy and research team are designing a research study to explore the benefits of cannabis for people who use opioids.

Next Steps:

- Washroom assessment, development of recommendations for overdose washroom safety, and finalization of the overdose washroom implementation strategy in Q2.
- Policies and by-laws needing revisions to be identified at drug users working group meetings held in Q2.
- The Four Pillars review will be completed in Q2 and informed by discussion from the Justice Working Group and members of the Community Action Team.
- Staff will continue to liaise with M-J Milloy on steps to initiate cannabis study once Health Canada license is achieved.

V. Collaborative Leadership

Summary:

Mayoral Actions

Status: On Track - In Progress

Mayor Stewart is liaising with key provincial and regional partners on the option of striking a sub-committee of the Metro Vancouver Mayor's Committee to address the overdose crisis.

VCH Partnership

Status: On Track - In Progress

The City is meeting regularly with VCH partners, including VCH Aboriginal Health, to discuss the implementation of the Task Force recommendations. These bi-weekly sessions have provided an opportunity for knowledge exchange, co-planning, and requests for support on action items, including the Cascade of Care model, and emerging items such as OPS tours and opportunities for indoor inhalation OPS sites.

Employment Programs

Status: On Track - In Progress

EMBERS Eastside Works has developed a summary document to identify barriers to recruiting and retaining both employees and employers due to persistent and/or periodic mental health and substance use challenges. Staff are liaising with VCH and EMBERS to create a detailed proposal for the federal government request for additional and dedicated funding. In addition, an overview of Embers and video for philanthropists to provide information to funders is currently under development for distribution for potential funders and philanthropic partners to support the overall stability of the low-barrier employment program operations.

Justice Working Group

Status: On Track - In Progress

A Justice Working Group co-hosted by the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Police Department will work to identify gaps and risks of overdose in the criminal justice systems starting in Q2. Membership has been identified in collaboration with the VPD, VCH, BCCSU and Indigenous partners. Identifying current issues resulting in high risk for overdose upon sentencing, admittance to Vancouver jails and discharge will be the priority focus and staff will keep Mayor and Council comprised on immediate actions and recommendations throughout Q2 and Q3.

Next Steps:

- Mayor to present on the overdose crisis and work of the Task Force at the upcoming quarterly Metro Vancouver Mayor's Committee meeting in Q2 (to be confirmed).
- Continue to meet bi-weekly with VCH on Task Force implementation.
- Phase 2 project scoping for Eastside Works mental health and substance use supports for employees.
- Justice Working Group to meet in Q2.

VI. Communication

Summary:

BCCSU Resource Distribution

Status: Complete

BCCSU distributed existing information and resources related to the overdose crisis based on input from the City and VCH.

Recognition of Lives Lost

Status: Complete

The City Flag was flown at half-mast and a news release was distributed on April 14th, the 3-year anniversary of the announcement of the overdose crisis. Arrangements have been confirmed with the City Manager's office to fly the flag at half-mast again on August 31st, International Overdose Awareness Day.

Public Information Sharing

Status: Complete

City staff engaged with VCH to improve communications to the public, including expanding the reach of existing communication mechanisms such as VCH's overdose alert system and drug checking results.

The City website has been updated to include recent data on overdose calls, as well as information on overdose response and mental health and substance use, including resources for people seeking support. A new website tool - counter of days since the City of Vancouver has been declared a state of emergency - was developed and added to the website prior to the April 14th 3-year anniversary.

Next Steps:

- Consult the Vancouver CAT and Peer Working Group on ways of improving communications for people affected by and working in the overdose crisis.

Appendix B: Summary of Funding Requests to Senior Government

	Committed from City	Requested from Province	Requested from Federal	Ongoing (ON) or One-Time (OT)
Indigenous Healing & Wellness				
Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council	100,000	310,000*		ON
Pacific Association of First Nations Women	100,000	120,000*		ON
Peer Based Organization / Drug User Network				
Provincial organization for People Who Use Drugs		1,000,000		ON
Save Lives at Home: SROs and OD Prevention				
Tenant Overdose Response Organizers pilot	106,000	182,000		ON/OT**
Expand OD Prevention in SROs		1,000,000		ON
Lookout Housing Society 1-year washroom pilot	44,000			OT
Harm Reduction in Downtown Eastside				
Outdoor inhalation Overdose Prevention Site		355,000		ON
Secure Space for Clean Supply				
n/a				
Expand Access to Treatment Options				
Vancouver Police Board pilot re: continuity of treatment	100,000			OT
Low Barrier Employment				
EMBERS Eastside Works pilot and evaluation			500,000	ON
Harm Reduction, Treatment and Supports				
BC Centre for Substance Use 'Stronger Together' sessions	10,000			OT
RainCity Housing pilot program for Sex Workers***	20,000			OT
Kingsway Stroll Drop-in/OPS for Sex Workers***		\$2,500,000		ON
Collective Action for Systemic Changes				
Drawing Wisdom for training resources	20,000			OT
Total	500,000	5,252,000	715,000	

Appendix C: Draft Safe Supply Statement*

Vancouver is in a state of emergency; people are dying every day from an unregulated, poisoned drug supply. People have been dying for many years as a result of the toxic drug supply in Vancouver - these are preventable deaths. Following a drastic spike in deaths in April 2016, a provincial public health crisis was finally declared. Since that time, 3,639 people in BC have lost their lives to drug poisoning and overdose, and 969 people have died in Vancouver. Our city is at the epicenter of this crisis. The rise in deaths results from a drug supply poisoned with Fentanyl, an illicit opioid detected in over 85% of overdose deaths in 2018. To date, drug testing has indicated further contaminants in the drug supply including Carfentanil and benzodiazepines, which have made it more difficult to reverse overdoses with naloxone.

This crisis is affecting many different people who use different substances for different reasons. Drug poisonings are occurring among people who use opioids as well as those who use stimulants. People from all walks of life are affected by this crisis; we are all in this together. We believe that every person in Vancouver should have the right to access drugs with known composition. This means finding ways for people who regularly or intermittently use illegal substances to access a supply that is reliable and regulated.

Issues related to mental health and substance use are further exacerbated by the effects of poverty, homelessness, and colonization. We are committed to working with our partners, including people with lived and living experience of substance use, to address social determinants of substance use and to increase access to a safe supply. We are also committed to supporting people in their chosen pathways to wellness, from prevention to harm reduction and treatment, including Indigenous and cultural approaches.

Urgent action is required on multiple levels to prevent further deaths from drug poisoning. We call upon health professionals, all levels of governments and the public to join us in advocating for a safe supply of illegal drugs to protect and prevent further loss of our family members, friends, neighbours and loved ones.

**Note: Draft statement is still under consultation and does not include feedback from the Drug User Working Group meeting held on April 26, 2019. A finalized statement will be brought to Council in June.*

Appendix D: Draft Overdose Washroom Implementation Strategy - Summary Overview

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Objectives and anticipated outcomes

- Objective: Improve safety and overdose response in washrooms that are at high risk for overdoses
- Anticipated outcomes:
 1. Improve the overall safety of washrooms, including responding to adverse medical events and emergencies in washrooms
 2. Reduce the number of overdose deaths in washrooms due to poor washroom safety

Scope

In scope:

- Existing high risk washrooms that the City has some responsibility for (e.g. all City-owned, comfort stations, etc.)
- Existing high risk washrooms that the City has strong partnerships with (e.g. Parks, non-profit)
- High risk Parks washrooms (e.g. Oppenheimer Park)

Out of scope:

- Privately owned washrooms

Approach

- An Overdose Prevention Washroom Advisory Working Group has been developed, including City staff, Vancouver Coastal Health staff, first responders (Emergency Health Services, Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services), housing providers, and peer responders.
- Any location that had overdose calls is identified as high risk; the approach is data driven—using 2018 VFRS overdose call volume data
- A review of the City's design guidelines and Vancouver Coastal Health washroom guidelines have been reviewed for alignment and opportunities for strengthening emergency response in all City-owned locations.
- A risk assessment tool is under development to identify changes to be made in particular high risk sites as per Vancouver Coastal Health washroom guidelines. Site visits will be conducted in May/June by an Overdose Washroom Response Technical Team, including Vancouver Coastal Health staff, architects, first responders and City operators.
- Recommendations for both capital and programmatic and policy responses will be identified and any costs will be estimated.
- Draft Strategy will be presented to the Overdose Prevention Washroom Advisory Working Group and updates will be provided to Mayor and Council in June 2019.

Appendix E: Review of BCCSU's Report - Strengthen Recovery in British Columbia: The Path Forward

Background

Released July 2018, *Strategies to Strengthen Recovery in British Columbia: The Path Forward* identifies priorities for expanding and improving addiction recovery services in the province. The report, developed by the BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU), concludes it will convene four working groups comprising of health leaders and individuals with expertise in recovery to progress 39 priority action items towards improving recovery services in BC. Working groups are to be clustered as follows:

- Health Systems, Education and Clinical Tools
- Underserved and Vulnerable Populations
- Awareness and Celebration
- Policy, Regulation, Licensing and Enforcement.

BCCSU is a provincial organization mandated to develop, help implement, and evaluate evidence-based approaches to substance use and addiction.

Summary

The *Strategies to Strengthen Recovery in British Columbia* report provides a definition of recovery and a high-level summary of four recovery-oriented programs; residential treatment, recovery residences, 12-step mutual support groups and therapeutic communities. These programs were identified as important interventions for achieving and sustaining recovery. This is based on the findings of the *Survey of Life in Recovery from Addiction in Canada*.

Beyond drawing on the results of the *Survey of Life in Recovery from Addiction in Canada*, the report's methodology is not detailed and as a result, the basis of the recommendations provided later in the report are unclear, calling into question the rigor and validity of the report's findings.

A report released in 2017, by the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions (CARMHA) undertook a provincial review of publicly funded supportive residential programs¹. While not mentioned in the BCCSU report, the results of CARMHA's study suggest that clients admitted to live-in addiction recovery services in BC, both supportive residential programs and residential treatment programs have additional barriers to health, including mental health. Furthermore, CARMHA found that many people in live-in addiction recovery services also experience issues associated with unstable housing, homelessness, unemployment and involvement in the criminal justice system, contributing to adverse trajectories and persistent health inequities.

Public calls for the decriminalization of drugs from leaders such as the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition and Dr Bonnie Henry, BC Provincial Health Officer, also remains a critical issue to substance use policy and a recovery-oriented system of care; however, these perspectives are not raised in the report. A special report released by the BC Provincial Health Officer on 24

¹ Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions (2017) Publicly-Funded Live-in Addiction Recovery Services in BC: A Snapshot of the Sector, Retrieved from <http://www.streetohome.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Final-LIAR-Report-2017-May.pdf>

April, 2019 recommends that the Province of BC urgently move to decriminalize people who possess controlled substances for personal use².

While the BCCSU concludes it will convene four working groups comprising of health leaders and individuals to progress 39 priority action items, neither the membership nor a plan for implementation is identified. A number of actions assigned to specific working groups are within municipal jurisdiction (i.e. examine zoning bylaws and business licensing practices to ensure that recovery residences are well regulated and to prevent the proliferation of unsafe illegal rooming homes); however, the City of Vancouver's membership is not specifically identified or called upon in the report. Furthermore, the strategic lead of the BCCSU's Recovery Initiatives, Marshall Smith has since resigned from BCCSU and it is unclear what the next stages of this work might be given the sharpening focus of BCCSU and all partners on safe supply. It is also worth noting that Vancouver Coastal Health includes access to safe supply as part of recovery from opioid use disorder, rather than abstinence-based approaches.

Recommendations

- Based on this review there are no actions that can be immediately implemented by the City of Vancouver.
- If the City is to be engaged in future work, it should look to support policy, regulation, convening and stewardship of resources and activities that seek to advance recovery options for equity seeking groups in a way that is:
 - Considerate of trauma and concurrent conditions; and,
 - Seeks to address systems and structural issues at a municipal level associated with criminalization and persistent health and social inequities.

² Office of the Provincial Health Officer (2019) Stopping the harm: Decriminalization of people who use drugs in BC, Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/special-reports/stopping-the-harm-report.pdf>