

## Fact Sheet

**British Columbians are dying at unprecedented rates from completely preventable diseases and from drug overdose deaths.**

**Over 2000 people in BC have died from illicit drug overdose since 1992.** (BC Coroners Service)

**Illicit drug overdose is the leading cause of death for people 30 to 49 years in BC for the 5th year in a row.** (BC Provincial Health Officer)

There are currently 5 epidemics continuing to increase in the population of British Columbians who use drugs illicitly and their families and neighbours. Many of these epidemics are centered in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver but are spreading to all communities in BC. (BC Center for Disease Control)

The epidemics are TB, Syphilis, Hepatitis A, HIV/AIDS, and Hepatitis C. Of these, Hep C and HIV/AIDS are incurable and weigh on our health care system heavily. Each case of AIDS costs more than \$150,000.00 from diagnosis to death. (BC Center for Excellence)

Despite six or more reports written over the last six years to address this problem, virtually none of the recommendations made in these reports have been effectively implemented and, last year again, the deaths due to drug overdose and the new cases of AIDS and Hep C increased. (BC Center for Disease Control)

Everyone talks prevention and drug treatment but in reality our current Provincial Government spends \$50 million a year on Drug and Alcohol programs for the entire province. Compare this with our health care expenditures of 125 million per week (or 8 billion per year). The biggest single predictor of conversion to HIV/AIDS is lack of stable housing (VIDUS) and yet the provincial expenditures for new social housing are 80 million per year or less.

It is well known that by far most crimes committed in BC are drug charges or crimes committed to get drugs. (John Howard Society) Prisons house many prisoners who are very ill with incurable Hep C and HIV.

BC's Provincial Health Officer and Coroner have spoken out for comprehensive harm reduction and yet the only substantial money spent on poor, ill and addicted individuals was 7.2 million for added police! Vancouverites had their property taxes increased 1% to employ police to move drug users from one neighbourhood to another and to arrest hundreds of drug addicts many who are very ill who don't have access to drug treatment and other basic necessities any way.

**VANDU wants to know who is in charge and what plans are in place to stop these epidemics and the drug overdose deaths**

There are effective, well researched programs elsewhere (mostly in Europe) implemented to stop disease spreading, to lower crime and to save lives from overdose deaths and to prevent youth from becoming addicts. (Swiss Federal Office of Public Health)

These programs include: Realistic Drug Education for Youth, Detox and Treatment on Demand, Good Housing, Employment Opportunities, vastly Expanded Methadone Program as well as:

Safe Injection Rooms where users inject drugs in a clean supervised room thereby preventing the spread of disease and death by overdose. Other benefits include stopping public drug use and bringing marginal ill users into contact with health care workers..

Legal Heroin Prescription programs attract users who will not participate in methadone maintenance and reduce street drug dealing. There are HIV positive addicts dealing drugs and selling sex who are very ill. Since they face a painful illness it makes sense to prescribe heroin and end their criminalization. There is not a moral problem caring for users by providing good medical care and appropriate pain relief. Rather, it is immoral to leave users on the street without adequate housing and health care! Currently disease continues to spread to younger and younger people (the average age of a person acquiring AIDS in the early 1980's was 32 – it is now 23). (BC's Framework for Action on HIV/AIDS, 1998)

Adequate, Accessible Drug Treatment is not an option for most sick, homeless, and/or very poor people who use drugs. Everyone always says we need more treatment – yet none appears. It is estimated that 200 detox beds are needed immediately. (BC Provincial Health Officer, 1998)

Currently in BC the average age of a drug user is younger indicating that our current policies, drug programs and scare tactic drug education encourage drug use. In Switzerland where heroin prescription is available addicts are getting older indicating a decrease in heroin use amongst teens. (Swiss Federal Office of Public Health)

**For more information: Ann Livingston 604-683-4797 or Bud Osborn 604-608-1369**

This event is sponsored by:

VANDU, the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users *who work to improve the lives of people who use drugs through user based peer support and education.*

BC ANTI-PROHIBITION LEAGUE *respects the right of adult Canadians to choose what they consume and demands the repeal of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.*