

**VANDU, the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, is gathered here today to express our grief and outrage at the overdose deaths of our brothers and sisters, friends and neighbours.**

**Facts:** (from the Provincial Health Officers Report: HIV, Hepatitis and Injection Drug Use in B.C. -- Pay Now or Pay Later)

- The number of overdose deaths in B.C. has increased by 37% this year, 1998.
- In B.C. drug overdose is the leading cause of death for adults aged 30-49 for the fifth year in a row.
- Almost 2000 people in B.C. have died of illicit drug overdose since 1992.

For many years, community leaders have lobbied for more detox, drug treatment and social housing to no avail. Government studies estimate that *B.C. needs 1000 detox beds -- B.C. currently has less than 100*. All three levels of government have taken no action to respond to this serious health problem.

Safe injection sites are an inexpensive intervention that can be immediately implemented to curb this slaughter. By providing a place for users to shoot up, Chinatown, the Downtown Eastside and Gastown can be preserved for residents and tourists.

Legal prescription of heroin and cocaine has also been shown to reduce death and disease and will help put dealers out of business and will reduce the break-ins in Vancouver (which are among the highest in North America).

VANDU is a group of users and former users. We work to improve the lives of people who use illicit drugs. We encourage effective well researched interventions to reduce death, disease and crime.

**How many deaths does it take until we know that too many people have died? ...2000? ...the death of a loved one?**