



March 20, 2003

His Worship, Mayor Larry Campbell
and the Councillors of the City of Vancouver
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Chairperson Larry Campbell,
and the members of the Vancouver Police Commission
c/o 312 Main Street,
Vancouver, BC V6A 2T2

Dear Mayor/Chairperson Campbell, Vancouver City Councillors, and Members of the Police Commission:

We write to express our strong opposition to the re-deployment of 50 police officers from various community policing stations and duties to the Downtown Eastside, as well as to the request to the City for funding of an additional 44 new police officers, ostensibly for the purpose of bolstering the City's ongoing efforts to address the health and social problems afflicting the Downtown Eastside. Although the recent reports of police misconduct in dealing with persons addicted to illicit drugs, and at immediate risk of HIV infection, are a great cause for concern for our organizations, even if the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) had a perfect record in the Downtown Eastside we would remain adamantly opposed for the following reasons.

First, according to both the available research and the experiences of our membership, there is no evidence that law enforcement is an effective strategy to deal with the problems of addictions. In fact, the provision of drug treatment services has been shown to be many times more cost effective in countless economic analyses. Since the provision of drug treatment services in British Columbia is woefully inadequate, this is an obvious place in which to invest available funding.

Second, even if adequate drug treatment was in place for persons addicted to illicit drugs who are willing to undergo treatment – and we stress it is not – enforcement has also been shown to be highly ineffective. Specifically, it has been demonstrated, in countless settings throughout the developed world, that addicts will continue to use drugs in the face of serious consequences including risk of HIV infection and

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criminal sanctions. As above, for these individuals HIV prevention and community harm reduction programs have been shown to provide a much greater benefit to the taxpayer and the community at large. Further, if the strategy behind the push for additional officers is one of supply reduction, we would ask you to seek the advice of any American public health scientist or economist; we are confident they will provide you with unequivocal scientific documentation demonstrating that illicit drugs cannot be controlled from the supply-side.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, absent from the debate regarding how to deal with the drug problem in the Downtown Eastside has been the great deal of evidence demonstrating that law enforcement can have a highly negative impact by forcing drug users into higher risk environments. The 50% reduction in sterile syringes being sought from the VANDU needle exchange in the wake of "Operation 24/7" (the ill-considered decision by the VPD to maintain a constant and intrusive police presence at the Carnegie Centre) is only one example of this concern. Without adequate prevention measures and drug treatment services in place, we remain deeply concerned that the deployment of additional officers in the Downtown Eastside will serve only to increase HIV transmission and overdoses by driving drug users deeper into the Downtown Eastside's worst hotels and back alleys where syringes will be shared and other harms exacerbated. With regards to the potential of incarceration, we would also ask you to consider the wealth of evidence demonstrating elevated HIV risk among incarcerated addicts, and the dearth of evidence suggesting that incarceration is a cost-effective way for society to treat addiction.

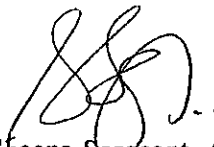
If City Council or members of the Police Board would like to be provided with the large amount of scientific literature on which we have based our plea, we would be happy to provide this to you through the librarian at the Pacific AIDS Resource Centre. Alternatively, if you would like to hear testimonials from our membership with regards to the lack of drug treatment and HIV and overdose prevention programs, this could also be arranged through contacting our various boards.

In short, we would ask the City Council and the Police Board to initiate an evidence-based drug strategy in which taxpayers' dollars are directed into programs for which there is ample evidence of cost-effectiveness. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



Malsah, Acting Chair
On behalf of the Board of Directors
British Columbia Persons with AIDS Society



Sheena Sargeant, Acting Executive Director
on behalf of the Board of Directors
YouthCO AIDS Society



Rick Barnes, Communications Coordinator
On behalf of the Board of Directors
AIDS Vancouver