

HARM REDUCTION

SUMMER NEWS 2022

HARM REDUCTION

Zuʔmintéx^w

“Holding somebody until they can stand up for themselves”.

“There are no hopeless cases only hopeless methods.”

Elder Garry Oleman



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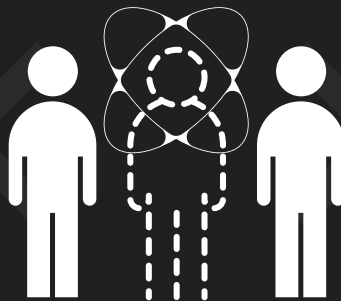
NEW NORMAL?



YOUR DRUGS?



The pandemic changed the way we see the world. It also changed what is in your drugs.
The only way to know is with drug checking.



This summer, check your drugs before you party.
Service available in your community and on site at many festivals.
Learn when, how & where at drugchecking.ca



Drug Checking

HARM REDUCTION IN A POST PANDEMIC FESTIVE CONTEXT

New normal.

Festivals, gatherings, parties.

After a two year hiatus, we are preparing to gather in thousands under the love of music, friendship, dancing, arts and whatever your jam is. The Interior Health region usually hosts an incredible variety of events and this year is no exception. But what has changed?

Festivals are an experimental ground for a population that converges from all walks of life. Some are seasoned lifers that live and breathe the music and culture, while some may be first timers, curious and eager to have fun on a summer weekend. All will be looking forward to a feeling of connection, new experiences and hedonistic opportunities, long awaited since the start of the pandemic. Many will choose to transform their experience through the use of drugs, from well known alcohol to, new for some, illicit substances.

The pandemic created a situation where there has been significant transformations in the drug supply, witnessed through drugs checked by community drug checking endeavours. These changes have been tragic for all of us, with consequences ranging from drug related health complications to higher death rates than ever.

As well as the drug supply issues, there will also be newcomers to the scene, with perhaps less knowledge about the drugs that they are curious to experiment with. Keen partiers may also feel the urge to partake in substance use more than usual, as the burgeoning excitement of being back together intensifies.

This year, Interior Health is contributing to Drug Checking efforts in festive situations. In partnership with community organizations, there will be FTIR and test strip drug checking services offered at both Bass Coast and Shambhala Music festival, events that gather approximately 5000 and 16,000 people respectively. Some smaller events are serviced by their local harm reduction related agencies. Not only do these services enable people who use drugs to make informed choices about their use, they also allow an incredible opportunity to engage in a conversation around drugs, providing education in the scope of harm reduction.

Drug checking services at festivals allow us to monitor what is circulating in the ever changing supply and act upon it. Extra vigilance will be paramount for this summer's festivals. After a 2-year interruption, the only thing that we can say for sure is that risk and inconsistency are unquestionably the "new normal" within the illicit drug supply.

If you plan to use substances this year, consider using one of the drug checking services spread across the IHA region. Find out where is the closest to you at drugchecking.ca

Visit drugchecking.ca for information.



ENDERBY'S OVERDOSE CRISIS CALLS FOR "GENTLER WAYS"

NORTH OKANAGAN CITY HAS THE THIRD HIGHEST RATE OF TOXIC DRUG DEATHS IN BC. EVERYONE OF THE 19 PEOPLE WHO DIED IN ENDERBY DUE TO AN OVERDOSE WAS A PERSON WHO MATTERED, WHO WAS LOVED AND HAD DREAMS

This spring, the North Okanagan Harm Reduction Coordinator had the pleasure of working with multiple partners including Splat-sin and Enderby leadership on developing an anti-stigma event. Stigma plays an integral role in the toxic drug crisis and fighting stigma means talking about illicit substance use, conveying compassion and concern, and normalizing naloxone kits and naloxone training. On May 30th, Splat-sin Kukpi7 (Chief) Doug Thomas, Tk-wamipla7 (councillor) Bev Thomas, Enderby Councilors Roxanne Davyduke and Raquel Knust, and Denis Delisle, Regional District of North Okanagan collaborated with the First Nation Health Authority, the Splat-sin Health Centre, and the Interior Health Authority on addressing stigma. Multiple news sources were present to amplify the leader's message of concern for their community, their call to address stigma, compassion for those using illicit substances and their encouragement that everyone gets naloxone training. Kukpi7 (Chief) Doug Thomas says, battling the crisis is not just a matter of erasing the stigma around drug use, but also one of prejudice and reconciliation.

"Just like any other prejudice, people pre-judge when it comes to drugs and alcohol," said Thomas. "It's one of the symptoms people must understand when it comes to truth and reconciliation.

"If you see someone on the street, you are only scratching the surface - you don't know what that person has been through." The leaders invite other communities to plan anti-stigma events.

PEER FOCUSED NALOXONE TRAINING AND ADVANCED OVERDOSE RESPONSE EDUCATION

Overdose prevention services and the harm reduction team have been working on educating IH staff and community partners on Naloxone training and advanced overdose response. They have worked collaboratively with supportive housing sites and community shelter staff to roll out this initiative. This team works alongside a peer (Devon), who provides a specialized lens of support and information. Devon so fluently speaks of his own lived experience that builds connections to end stigma, raise awareness and better care for people who use substances. Devon states that his role as an overdose prevention peer has given him the ability to utilize his substance use history to help better prepare people to act when an overdose occurs. The team has started providing this new training initiative that will help better prepare staff at supportive housing site and shelters when it comes to unique overdose situations not talked about in regular Naloxone training. This training is also unique in the fact that you get the knowledge from a person living in that lifestyle as well as a nurse's knowledge on overdose best practice.



New! Toxic Drug & Health Alerts

A new health alert system has been launched across Interior Health in response to the ongoing toxic drug emergency.

The Toxic Drug Alerts system uses text messages to send alerts about toxic drugs circulating in the region.

IH is the first health authority to launch this new system, although a similar program called RADAR has been successfully used in Vancouver Coastal Health since 2015.

"We are thrilled to have this new tool available in the Interior to support people and to get information out immediately to those who need it most," said Susan Brown, IH president and CEO.

"As the number of lives lost continues to grow, we are focused on removing barriers to supports, and implementing new strategies to prevent drug poisonings and deaths and mitigate harm from the toxic drug supply."

IH's harm reduction manager, Jessica Bridgeman said that timely and targeted information regarding the current drug supply is "vital" as we see the toxicity of illicit drugs increase at an alarming rate. "Alerts will help people make better informed decisions and ultimately help reduce harms, including overdose and death, from poisoned drugs," she explained.

People who use drugs, those who support them and any other community members are encouraged to opt-in for toxic drug alerts by texting the keyword JOIN to 253787. They'll receive toxic drug and drug poisoning alerts, as well as any other relevant major public health alerts in the future. In addition, subscribers can also anonymously submit information relating to toxic drugs or drug poisonings by text using the keyword OD.

Manager of harm reduction at the BC Centre for Disease Control, Sara Young noted that the priority is getting people access to a safe supply, but this is a vital measure until we arrive at that point. "Toxic drug alerts will be really helpful in letting us know what is going around in our communities, and can help people make harm reduction decisions for themselves," she said.

This alert system is expected to expand to additional health authorities this summer.



Sign up for
toxic drug alerts

Text **JOIN** to **253787**
ALERTS

Standard message rates may apply

NEW EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY

There is a growing demand for harm reduction information by all types of organizations that provide services to people who use drugs in Canada. This [toolkit](#) provides foundational information on harm reduction for service providers working with people who use drugs (including support workers, outreach workers, nurses and workers with lived and living experience). The toolkit is free to access and is available to anyone to use or share for personal learning, organizational trainings and/or other capacity-building efforts.



The toolkit contains four units that can be accessed individually or completed together for a more comprehensive overview of harm reduction fundamentals. Organizations and individual learners can decide which parts of the toolkit are most appropriate for them.

welcome to the team



We are pleased to announce that Adrian Preece and Heather Lee have joined the Harm Reduction Program as Youth Coordinators

**ADRIAN
PREECE**

Adrian joined Interior Health in 2020 and has been most recently working in the role of Peer Coordinator at Vernon Downtown MHSU clinic, and also supporting the Overdose Prevention Site (OPS).

Adrian has extensive work experience across the continuum of substance use services in both the UK and Canada. He got his start in harm reduction services on a 12 month international internship with DEYAS (Downtown Eastside Youth Activity Society), doing outreach and drop-in centre work in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Adrian has developed a number of training and information campaigns and he is looking forward to bringing his experience and enthusiasm to this new role.

In his free time Adrian can be found experimenting in the kitchen (making delicious food, and a ton of mess), while later being dragged around the neighbourhood by his exuberant labradoodle, Ruffin.



**HEATHER
LEE**

We are pleased to announce that Heather Lee will be joining Population Health in the Harm Reduction Program as Coordinator, Harm Reduction – Youth Services as of July 11, 2022.

Heather has been working as a Clinical Operations Manager in Golden and Invermere for the past year but is excited to return to her substance use background. Heather has been an RN for 12 years and her background includes street nursing, overseas humanitarian work, detox, suboxone and iOAT clinics as well as in hospital substance use consulting. She has been living in Golden for two years where she started in Public Health Nursing.

When not working Heather can be found backcountry skiing, kayaking, hiking, mountain biking, rafting and general shenanigans with her husband and toddler.



FINDING HARM REDUCTION INFO ON INTERIOR HEALTH'S NEW WEBSITE

Change can be hard even when that change is good. Interior Health has a swanky new website that looks great and is easier to navigate. But if you were used to finding harm reduction info on the old website, you may be feeling a little lost with the new one. Here are a few tips to help you find what you are looking for.

HARM REDUCTION INFORMATION FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

This is where you can find all the info that our external partner agencies need about naloxone, harm reduction supplies, overdose prevention and drug checking guides, peer engagement tools, courses like Harm Reduction 101 and the fentanyl test strip online course and more.

How to get there from the home page? Click the ["Information For"](#) button at the top and select community partners and look for the harm reduction button.

HARM REDUCTION

This page is where you will find high level information for the general public on harm reduction as it applies to substance use - what is harm reduction and why is it important; a brief description of the key harm reduction services and all the sharps information is here too. To get here from the home page click the Health Wellness button then pick Substance Use and Addiction, and find the [Harm Reduction button](#).

DRUG AND OVERDOSE ALERTS

The most current drug and overdose alerts are here. To see all the alerts in the region click on the little bell on the home screen then choose from COVID-19, Environmental or Toxic Drugs.



OVERDOSE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

This page is for the general public. There is information here on how to identify and respond to an overdose, overdose response services, overdose and substance use related news and surveillance (Coroners reports and BCCDC dashboards). To get here from the home page click the Health & Wellness button then pick Substance Use and Addiction and click on the [Overdose button](#).

SEXUAL HEALTH

Here you can find information on STIs, HIV, HCV, gender identity and sexual health resources, Aboriginal sexual health resources and more. To get here from the home page click the Health and Wellness button then pick [Sexual Health](#).

