



JANUARY 4, 2023

# Update Bulletin:

## Responding to the Toxic Drug Crisis

*This issue of the Update Bulletin provides brief highlights from a few Sprint projects related to the toxic drug crisis. The [toxic drug crisis poster](#) provides additional information.*

### Message From:

**Dr. Réka Gustafson,**  
*chief medical health officer*

Deaths caused by an unregulated and toxic drug supply continue to increase among residents of Vancouver Island. Teams at Island Health work with a range of partners to prevent drug poisoning events and deaths, and to improve the health of people who use substances.

Island Health is responding to the recommendations made by the [BC Coroners Service Death Panel Review](#) with Mental Health and Substance



Use (MHSU) Sprint initiatives led by Keva Glynn, MHSU Executive Director. With the support of MHSU operational leads and staff, as well as the Island Health system, the Sprint structure aims to be more responsive to the needs of our patients and communities.

This issue of the Update Bulletin provides brief highlights from a few Sprint projects related to the toxic drug crisis. Together, these initiatives will tackle this complex public health emergency and support people to prevent, treat and help recover from substance use disorders.

Thank you to those who are working towards comprehensive services to respond to this crisis, to everyone who works with people who use substances, and to people with lived experiences who provide their knowledge to help create a system of care that treats everyone with the dignity and respect.

## Feature Topic: Mental Health & Substance Use Sprint projects related to the toxic drug crisis



### Text-Based Alert System

People who sign up will receive text alerts when a drug advisory is issued in their community. These alerts let people know when there are higher than

normal drug overdoses and deaths so that people can make an informed decision about using. Text “JOIN” to ALERTS (253787) to sign-up.

### **Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS)**

Inhalation (smoking) substances is a common mode of consumption. Offering inhalation services at OPS will provide more opportunity for people to use more safely. Nanaimo and Victoria are communities seeking permanent OPS inhalation services, and focused work is underway to secure a site in the Comox Valley. The Victoria and Nanaimo sites will be Wellness and Recovery Centres that offer additional on-site support services with improved access to addictions medicine, treatment and recovery opportunities across the continuum of care.

### **Emergency Department (ED) Quality Improvement Project**

Improving follow up and linkages to care for people who have been treated in the ED for drug poisoning. The goal of this work is to streamline and standardize referral pathways and ensure a range of service options are available to people in their community.

### **Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT).**

Increasing access to OAT services and supporting people to remain in programs can help transition people away from the toxic and unregulated drug supply and towards recovery. Project improvements include training and supporting RNs and RPNs in community settings with prescribing OAT, and strengthening client retention on OAT through clinic-led quality improvement initiatives such as text reminders.

### **Mental Health and Substance Use Supports.**

Projects include: Improving access to community-based counseling services for people with moderately severe mental health or substance use needs; Enhancing intensive outpatient supports (Bridging Care) by providing short-term, intensive structured programming; Strengthening same day walk-in services for single session therapy and referrals in the South Island; Increasing availability of community-based treatment beds by leveraging community based partners and facilities; Partnering with Indigenous-led

service providers to increase access to counselling services and bed-based treatment services.

**Decriminalization of Small Amounts of Drugs.**

Supporting the [BC Government](#) in communicating to Island Health residents about support resources, treatment options and care for people who use substances. Island Health is working closely with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, law enforcement and other health authorities to ensure compliance with the federal exemption that takes effect January 31, 2023. Decriminalization is one strategy among many to address the stigma and fear around drug use and transition away from enforcement policies and toward public health services.

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## Learn More

Check out these resources to support you in this work:

- [MHSU Sprint intranet](#)
- [Toxic drug crisis poster](#)
- [Wellbeing.ca](#) (BC Government)