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Update Bulletin: Special Edition

Harm Reduction – Substance Use policy

Message From:

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Island Health is committed to providing inclusive, compassionate and person-centred care that align with our C.A.R.E. values. To that end, we launched our new [Harm Reduction – Substance Use policy](#) in August 2022. At the core of the policy is a health equity orientation to harm reduction – the cornerstones of which include cultural humility, cultural safety, and trauma and violence-informed practice. By integrating these approaches in our work, we can ensure that Island Health services are safer, more equitable and more accessible to all.

As you are likely aware, the toxic drug crisis was declared as a public health emergency in 2016. Since then, over ten thousand people have died in B.C. from illicit drug toxicity. In 2021, we lost 330 people from the communities that Island Health serves ([BC Coroners](#)). As communities across Island Health continue to experience death and injury related to the toxic drug supply, our commitment to reduce harms is imperative –

the time for this policy is now.

Many point-of-care clinicians and medical staff, as well as leaders, participated in creating the policy because we know that harm reduction services for all substance types are part of an evidence-informed continuum of care. With this policy, Island Health is stating that access to harm reduction services is one of our standards of care. The safety of our patients, clients, residents and team members remains vital and practicing harm reduction approaches does not mean that we require staff to put themselves or others at risk. It's about treating all people with dignity and respect. It's about support, not stigma.

We invite all staff to embark on a learning journey – as individuals and as interdisciplinary teams – to understand what harm reduction is, what it means to them, and how this approach to care can improve the health outcomes for the patients, clients, residents and communities we serve.

Facts

Between January 2017 and December 2021 in the Island Health region, the toxic drug crisis caused...

1,254 deaths

87% interacted
with healthcare in year before death

12,532 overdoses
(non-fatal illicit drug poisoning event)

Introduction to the Harm Reduction – Substance Use policy

Support Not Stigma.

Most people who die from drug poisonings interact with health services in the months leading up to their death. Many of these deaths are preventable, and opportunities exist to improve our health-care services to meet the needs of people who use substances. A harm reduction approach is meeting people where they are and building an environment of trust and respect. At the same time, we have the opportunity to plan care to reduce the adverse health and social harms of substance use.

Watch a [short introductory video](#) for the Harm Reduction – Substance Use policy.

We want to instill the view that substance use is a personal and complex issue and we can help reduce negative health outcomes by practicing a harm reduction approach. It means that care planning needs to be individually tailored to reduce and prevent the unique harms that may be associated with a persons' substance use. The policy provides a framework for creating environments where more people are able to receive compassionate care in a non-judgmental and non-stigmatizing manner, regardless of their substance use.



The policy was developed over three years in collaboration with representatives from Population and Public Health, Professional Practice, Mental Health and Substance Use, and Addictions Medicine. It has also been informed by numerous consultations and ongoing dialogue with Indigenous Health, acute care staff, Occupational Health and Safety, as well as other agencies such as the First Nations Health Authority and the BC Centre for Disease Control. Also, the dedicated and ongoing collaboration with people with lived and living experience that have influenced this work has been instrumental.

To support implementation of this new policy, we have created several resources for you, including a [Leadership Checklist](#) and a [Harm Reduction Handbook](#). These resources will help all Island Health staff and medical staff in their personal and team learning journeys toward understanding and integrating harm reduction approaches into their practice.

Learn More

We invite you to join us on this learning journey. You can start today by checking out these resources to support you in this work:

- [Harm Reduction Intranet page \(Island Health staff only\)](#)
- [Harm Reduction 101 \(Learning Hub\)](#)
- [San'yas cultural safety training](#)

Survey

Take the Substance Use Perceptions Survey

Help us determine next steps in policy implementation and sustainment. A follow-up survey will be available six months after the launch of the policy to help us measure impact and ensure we are on the right track.

The survey is anonymous, and takes about five minutes to complete.

[TAKE THE SURVEY](#)

Lanyards & Pins

Show your commitment to reducing stigma and show people who use substances that you C.A.R.E. We ask that you make a personal commitment to the following:

I dedicate myself to being:

The survey is anonymous, and takes about five minutes to complete.

- ♥ Compassionate
- ♥ Stigma-free in words and actions
- ♥ Culturally humble
- ♥ Trauma-informed

Send your personalized commitment to harmreduction@islandhealth.ca and request your lanyard and pin through inter-office mail.

This Special Edition of the Update Bulletin is shared with all Island Health staff, medical staff and volunteers. Please contact the Harm Reduction – Substance Use policy team with questions or comments: harmreduction@islandhealth.ca