

MINISTRY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE

Cliff # 1097506

PREPARED FOR: Doug Hughes, Deputy Minister - **FOR INFORMATION**

TITLE: BC Centre on Substance Use Drug Checking Report

PURPOSE: To summarize the BC Centre on Substance Use evidence review report *Drug Checking as a Harm Reduction Intervention* and provide advice regarding the possible risks associated with its publication.

BACKGROUND:

Drug checking refers to a service that enables people who use drugs to chemically analyse their street-acquired drugs and receive individualized and fact-based consultation regarding the contents, and the associated risks, of compounds detected in their samples.¹

In July 2016, Vancouver Coastal Health launched a drug checking pilot project at Insite. This pilot aimed to inform Insite service users of the presence of fentanyl in the drugs they intend to use. Nurses provided consumers with test strips and offered simple instructions for diluting and testing their drugs. Between July 2016 and August 2017, more than 1,400 samples were checked, 80% of which tested positive for fentanyl. An evaluation showed that drug checking could reduce overdose harms by helping clients identify contaminated drugs and be more cautious when using (e.g., reducing their dose).²

The expansion of drug checking technologies as a harm reduction intervention is a key element of the provincial response to the public health emergency. Treasury Board recently approved the release of \$3 million over three years (\$1 million in 2017/18, 2018/19, and 2019/20) to support the expansion of drug checking services at locations providing supervised consumption or overdose prevention services.

The BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCS) was commissioned by the BC Ministry of Health to conduct a detailed review of the literature regarding techniques, implementation models, and the benefits and risks associated with drug checking as a harm reduction intervention, with a particular focus on existing drug checking services in other jurisdictions (see Appendix A).

The report also shows that drug checking services can provide real-time, street-level data that may help to determine how harm reduction services are directed and gives health and other service providers a means to collect and assess information about what is circulating in the illegal drug market. s.13

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¹ British Columbia Centre on Substance Use. (2017). A Guideline for the Clinical Management of Opioid Use Disorder. Retrieved from: http://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/BC-OD-Guidelines_FINAL.pdf (accessed November 7, 2017).

² Mark Lynsyshyn, Carolyn Dohoo, Mohammad Karamouzian, Sara Forsting, Ryan McNeil, and Thomas Kerr. (2017). *Evaluation of a Fentanyl Drug Checking Program for Clients of a Supervised Injection Site, Vancouver, Canada*. Vancouver, British Columbia: Vancouver Coastal Health and BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS.

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The report concludes that research is needed to determine whether drug checking services alter the behaviour of service users. There are currently no clinical trials examining the direct impact of drug checking services on substance use behaviours or health outcomes. The BCCSU has requested that the final report be released publicly.

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OPTIONS:

Option 1: Approve the release of the report

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RECOMMENDED OPTION: Option 1.

Program ADM/Division: Neilane Mayhew, Associate Deputy Minister
Program Contact (for content): Carolyn Davison, A/Executive Director
Drafter: Kendall Hammond, Policy Analyst

**MINISTRY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS
INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE**

Cliff # 1097855

PREPARED FOR: Doug Hughes, Deputy Minister - **FOR INFORMATION**

TITLE: BC Centre on Substance Use Proposals

PURPOSE: To summarize recent funding proposals from the BC Centre on Substance Use

BACKGROUND:

The BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) is a provincially networked organization with a mandate to develop, implement and evaluate evidence-based approaches to substance use. BCCSU is located at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver with researchers based at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University.

BCCSU aims to improve the integration of best practices and care across the continuum of responses to substance use through the collaborative development of policies, guidelines and standards. With support from the Province of BC, BCCSU aims to transform substance use policies, programs, and services by translating research into education and care guidance, thereby serving and improving the health of all British Columbians. See Appendix A for details of BCCSU's planned activities over the next five years.

BCCSU plays a key role in the response to the opioid overdose public health emergency, partnering with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, the Ministry of Health and others on improvements to the treatment system and evidence reviews. As of June 5th, 2017, BCCSU became responsible for the clinical guidance and health care professional education for BC's opioid agonist treatment program (i.e. methadone, buprenorphine/naloxone and slow release oral morphine).

The following are examples of BCCSU activities completed or ongoing related to the overdose response:

- Guidance for the clinical management of opioid use disorder
http://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BC-ODU-Guidelines_June2017.pdf (completed)
- Guidance for injectable opioid agonist treatment for opioid use disorder
<http://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/BC-iOAT-Guidelines-10.2017.pdf> (completed)
- Evidence review and recommendations on drug checking (completed – but not published)
- Operational guidance for supervised consumption services
<http://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/BC-SCS-Operational-Guidance.pdf> (completed)
- Online addiction medicine training program <https://www.bccsu.ca/courses/online-addiction-medicine-diploma-program/> (ongoing)

Through its focus on education and training, BCCSU has addressed an important limiting factor in efforts to scale up treatment responses to the overdose epidemic by expanding the availability of trained health care providers. Similarly, BCCSU's focus on working with health system partners on rapid guideline development supports promotion of consistent, evidence-based responses across the province. BCCSU's knowledge translation work is bringing together patients, their families, and sub-sectors that have not previously worked together through a shared commitment to using evidence to address the public health emergency.

BCCSU has put forward a number of proposals (see attached appendices) to support the immediate response to the overdose emergency, including requests for a funding lift.
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BCCSU (via St Paul's Hospital Foundation) has received \$10M of one-time funding from the Ministry of Health to support its establishment for endowment to ensure it has long-term sustainability. BCCSU also received \$950K in 2017/18, as part of its \$1.9M annual cost-sharing arrangement with the Ministry of Health, for core operational activities (e.g. key staff salaries, space).

DISCUSSION:

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ADVICE:

Fully support the funding proposal from BCCSU.

Program ADM/Division: Keva Glynn, A/Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Monitoring and Evaluation

Program Contact (for content): Carolyn Davison, A/Executive Director

Drafter: David Hay, Policy Analyst

Date: November 11, 2017

NOTES:

Appendix A – BCCSU 5 year workplan

Appendix B – BCCSU Funding Proposal

Appendix C – Provincial Opioid Addiction Treatment Support Program budget

Appendix D – Provincial Interdisciplinary Clinical Addiction Fellowship overview and budget

Appendix E – Drug Checking Coordination and Evaluation Budget

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