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**Subject:** Fw: IBN - Final copy with Taryn for approval  
**Date:** November 23, 2018 1:45:39 PM  
**Attachments:** [1123237 - IBN - Safer Drug Supply Initiative.docx](#)  
[APPENDIX A - Safer Drug Supply Initiative Proposal 2018-11-08.docx](#)

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Attached, please find the IBN for Safer Drug Supply 2 day scenario building session..  
Please let me know if you have any questions  
Miranda

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## PROVINCIAL HEALTH OFFICER INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE

Cliff # 1123237

**PREPARED FOR:** Hon. Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions – **FOR INFORMATION**

**TITLE:** Safer Drug Supply Initiative Proposal by the Provincial Health Officer

**PURPOSE:** To outline a Provincial Health Officer proposal developed in collaboration with the Overdose Emergency Response Centre to provide a safer drug supply for people with opioid use disorder who consume illegal drugs.

### **BACKGROUND:**

On April 14, 2016, the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) declared a public health emergency in response to an unprecedented increase in overdose harms due to an unpredictable, highly-toxic illegal drug supply.<sup>1</sup> At least 1,452 people died from a suspected illicit drug overdose in 2017, an increase from 526 in 2015. At least 972 people died from an overdose in the first eight months of 2018.<sup>2</sup> Toxicology examinations show that the percentage of overdose deaths involving fentanyl increased from 4% in 2012 to 81% thus far in 2018.<sup>3</sup> Investigations of suspected overdose deaths found that 77% were reported to have been regular users of illegal drugs and 69% used alone.<sup>4</sup>

People with opioid use disorder, a chronic relapsing medical condition, are at high risk of overdose. It is estimated that there 115,000 people living with opioid use disorder in BC and 42,200 people who inject drugs. It is not possible for the treatment system to rapidly manage this number of people as “patients”, given the many challenges in achieving and retaining the current opioid use disorder treatment population of 18,500.<sup>5</sup>

In December 2017, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA) escalated the response by establishing the Overdose Emergency Response Centre (OERC). The OERC role is to support “a diversity of community-level, low barrier services tailored to population/community needs, such as ... [a] safe drug supply (e.g., hydromorphone in supervised settings).”<sup>6</sup> The BC Overdose Action Exchange reports<sup>7</sup>, and a Vancouver Police Department report<sup>8</sup> recommended increasing access to a safer drug supply.

The BC Centre for Disease Control received funding from Health Canada for a pilot project to provide low barrier oral hydromorphone to people who use illegal drugs and is exploring implementing this using drug dispensing machines in a few locations.

In October 2018, the OERC received a proposal from Reos Partners, a consulting firm providing facilitation services, to convene at least one workshop to develop a provincial implementation plan for providing a safer drug supply to people with opioid use disorder who consume illegal drugs. MMHA is reviewing the proposal and a potential funding source.

The Office of the PHO, in collaboration with the OERC, has created a draft proposal (Appendix A) to develop a provincial implementation plan to provide people with opioid use disorder who consume illegal drugs with access to a safer drug supply. **s.13; s.17**

**s.13; s.17**

## DISCUSSION:

To date, the provincial response to the overdose emergency has prioritized actions that save lives, reduce stigma surrounding drug use, and build treatment and recovery services. It is estimated that these efforts averted 3,030 overdose deaths from April 2016 to December 2017.<sup>9</sup> However, additional actions are needed, targeted towards those at greatest risk of overdose (i.e. people who use indoors alone as well as people who use drugs regularly) who are not willing or able to enter into recovery.

While there is not a consensus on the definition of a safer drug supply, it can be described as providing people who use illegal drugs with drugs of known quality and concentration, to minimize the risk of overdose/poisoning while distancing them from the illegal market. Given that the recurring call for a safer drug supply for people has yet to be fully addressed, this needs to be explored as an important addition to mitigate the emergency.

While expecting to save lives and prevent serious health outcomes, the implications of implementing a safer drug supply could mean:

- accepting that people with opioid use disorder should have access to opioids to use for non-medical purposes (i.e. the provision of opioids without a prescription)
- obtaining federal exemptions from the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*
- further accelerating provision of oral and injectable opioid agonist treatment
- potential negative reaction to providing people at high risk of overdose with opioids paid for by the government, while many people receiving treatment for pain with opioids pay for their own medications
- commitment to rigorous scientific evaluation

The OERC is exploring options to reduce the cost of facilitating the workshop and other expenses associated with the proposal.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Government of British Columbia. (2016, April 14). *Provincial health officer declares public health emergency*. Retrieved from: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2016hlth0026-000568> (accessed October 10, 2018).
- <sup>2</sup> BC Coroners Service. (2018). *Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths in BC: January 1, 2008 to August 31, 2018*. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2018).
- <sup>3</sup> BC Coroners Service. (2018). *Fentanyl-Detected Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths: January 1, 2012 to June 30, 2018*. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/fentanyl-detected-overdose.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2018).
- <sup>4</sup> BC Coroners Service. (2018, September 27). *Illicit drug overdose deaths in BC: Findings of coroners' investigations*. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicitdrugoverdosedeadsinbc-findingsofcoronersinvestigations-final.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2018).
- <sup>5</sup> Nosyk, B. (2018). *Towards a comprehensive performance measurement system for opioid use disorder in British Columbia, Canada*. Health Canada Substance Use and Addictions Program. Grant no. 1819-HQ-000036.
- <sup>6</sup> Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. (2017). *Overdose Emergency Response Centre – Terms of Reference*. Retrieved from: [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/overdose-awareness/terms\\_of\\_reference\\_nov\\_30\\_final.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/overdose-awareness/terms_of_reference_nov_30_final.pdf) (accessed October 15, 2018).
- <sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/disease-system-statistics/overdose-response-reports>.
- <sup>8</sup> Vancouver Police Department. (2017). *The Opioid Crisis: The Need for Treatment on Demand. Review and recommendations*. Retrieved on from: <http://vancouver.ca/police/assets/pdf/reports-policies/opioid-crisis.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2018).
- <sup>9</sup> Irvine, M. (2018, October 4). *Estimated impact of overdose prevention sites, take-home naloxone, and opioid agonist therapies on preventing illicit drug-related deaths in B.C., Jan. 2012- Dec. 2017*. BC Centre for Disease Control Knowledge Update.

## **Appendix A: Safer Drug Supply Initiative – Draft October 31, 2018**

### **Context:**

British Columbians are currently experiencing unprecedented rates of opioid and other drug overdose/poisoning related harms including death due to an unpredictable, highly-toxic illegal drug supply. The complexity and dynamic nature of the overdose emergency requires a comprehensive response.

In December 2017, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions escalated the provincial response to the overdose emergency by establishing the Overdose Emergency Response Centre (OERC) to ensure that communities have access to a comprehensive package of essential services for overdose prevention. The OERC Terms of Reference states that its role is to support “a diversity of community-level, low barrier services tailored to population/ community needs, such as ... [a] safe drug supply e.g., hydromorphone in supervised settings.”<sup>i</sup> The BC Overdose Action Exchanges 2016, 2017, and 2018 reports<sup>ii</sup> and a Vancouver Police Department report in 2017<sup>iii</sup> recommended increased access to a safer drug supply, which was reiterated at the recent national Opioid Symposium held September 5-6, 2018.

While there is not a consensus on the definition of what constitutes a safer drug supply, it can generally be described as providing people who use illegal drugs with a supply of drugs of known quality and concentration, with the intent to minimize the risk of overdose/poisoning while at the same time separating them from the illegal market.

The BC Centre for Disease Control has been funded by Health Canada for a pilot project to provide low barrier oral hydromorphone to people who use illegal drugs, and is exploring doing this through a dispensing machine in a few locations.

Despite declaration of a public health emergency by the Provincial Health Officer in April 2016 and a substantial and concentrated effort by many organizations and individuals the opioid overdose death epidemic continues at a steady pace. Without that effort many more people would have died or been badly affected, however more needs to be done. Given that the recurring call for a “safer drug supply” for people with opioid use disorder (a chronic relapsing medical condition which places them at high risk of dying from the toxic illegal drug supply) has yet to be fully addressed, this needs to be explored as an important addition to other actions for mitigating this devastating epidemic.

### **Proposal:**

**Goal:** To develop a BC wide implementation plan to provide people with opioid use disorder who acquire drugs from the illegal market with access to a safer drug supply.

s.13; s.17

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Withheld pursuant to/removed as

s.13; s.17

## **References**

<sup>i</sup> Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. (2017). Overdose Emergency Response Centre Terms of Reference. Retrieved on September 19, 2018 from [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/overdose-awareness/terms\\_of\\_reference\\_nov\\_30\\_final.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/overdose-awareness/terms_of_reference_nov_30_final.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> See <http://www.bccdc.ca/our-services/programs/overdose-response> for these reports.

<sup>iii</sup> Vancouver Police Department (2017) The Opioid Crisis: The Need for Treatment on Demand. Review and recommendations, May 2017. Retrieved on October 26, 2017 from <http://vancouver.ca/police/assets/pdf/reports-policies/opioid-crisis.pdf>