



Tsleil-Waututh Nation

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Overdose Awareness and Reducing Harms at TWN

**Public Education Series brought to you by the
Mental Wellness Team**

TWN Health and Wellness Department

*** Trigger Warning:** We are offering this information for members to be informed about overdose awareness and harm reduction in support of the wellness of our community. Please read with care, as this content may be sensitive, both collectively and personally.

Learning About The Overdose Crisis

For the last 6 years, B.C. has been in the grip of an opioid overdose crisis. Overdose deaths increased dramatically during the pandemic. On average, 6 people lose their lives daily from a drug overdose; in 2021 alone, 2,224 people died from a toxic drug supply.

Dr. Patricia Daly, the Vice President, Public Health and Chief Medical Health Officer for Vancouver Coastal Health, said the overdose crisis killed 3,000 people in B.C. between January of 2020 and July of 2021, compared to the 1,800 who died from COVID-19 in the same period. Chief Coroner Lisa Lapointe, has repeatedly said that these numbers represent the lives of people who had dreams and families.

First Nations peoples are disproportionately represented in overdose deaths in BC and across Canada due to the legacy of colonialism, racism, and intergenerational trauma.

We would like to acknowledge that Tsleil-Waututh Nation has been personally affected by this crisis, losing several members during the pandemic to drug overdoses.



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Learning About Harm Reduction

One of the most helpful social responses that has stemmed from this opioid addiction crisis is **harm reduction**. Harm reduction is an approach to seeing and working with people struggling with substances, and takes a compassionate, safety-first perspective. The First Nations Health Authority describes harm reduction as follows:

Harm reduction is a public health approach that saves lives by minimizing harm and potential danger. A harm reduction approach meets people where they are at with open arms, acceptance and compassion – not judgment or shame. A harm reduction approach recognizes that every life is valuable and that substance use and addiction are complex and challenging. Indigenizing harm reduction and addiction treatment must involve integrating cultural and traditional Indigenous values that align with the principles of harm reduction.

Working at the forefront of harm reduction services are **Peer Support Workers**. Peers are people with lived experience of mental health and/or substance use who understand through their own experiences what it's like to live this day to day struggle. Peers are often the first people on the scene in the Downtown Eastside helping to literally save lives. Peer workers are essential frontline staff who have created their own field of work out of this crisis.

TWN has had our own peer staff in the past - a big thank you for all the hard work of Vanessa Gonzalez and Kiki George - and we are currently recruiting for a new TWN Peer Support Worker. Please see an upcoming HR posting on our website.

Drug Checking Alerts & Using Safe Supply Resources

Other ways to reduce the harms from the opioid crisis are **utilizing safe supply resources**. Every few weeks, an alert goes out warning people of fentanyl laced or potentially harmful substances. If you, or anyone you know uses hard drugs, encourage them to sign up for these services. Often the alerts will look like this:



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Two VCH Drug Checking Alerts issued March 8th 2022 for:

- *Colourless crystals bought in Vancouver*
- *Methamphetamine causing OD's and tested positive for fentanyl*

Check your drugs at any [OPS/SCS](#) and visit sites with drug checking services:
www.vch.ca/drugchecking

Help the Vancouver community stay safe, by helping warn people about contaminated street drugs and receiving drug contamination alerts. You can report and fill out an anonymous form online: <https://redcap.ubc.ca/flex/>

You can also share an alert via text by texting 'bad dope' to 236 999 3673 and follow the prompts; or if you would like to just receive alerts, text 'alert' to the same number to start receiving drug alert notifications to your phone. These alerts are always shared via this email to TWN members also!

Having Open Conversations

Talking about substance use and having open conversations helps to destigmatize using drugs and alcohol. This also puts the focus on helping people to use substances safely, access recovery and support services, and get to the underlying causes and conditions of substance use. Abstinence doesn't always have to be the end goal. Recovering from a harmful addiction is a unique and individual path for everyone.

Reaching Out for Support

Please get in touch with our *Mental Wellness Team* if you are struggling with drugs and alcohol or you know someone who is. Educate yourself and learn more about the opioid crisis we are in, harm reduction approaches, and the critical work of peer support. Groups like Alanon are there to support families of people using drugs and alcohol in a harmful way, as well as Support the Supporters, and family therapy options can be helpful too. Reach out for help, we are here to support you.

This article is in memory of all the lives lost to opioid addiction of Tsleil-Waututh community members.



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A Personal Story from our Tsleil-Waututh Community

One family who lost their son, brother, and father of 2 children, Jason Steven Gage Doolan, felt this heartbreaking struggle for so many years dealing with his addiction and then the grief of his death. Cece Guss recounts the personal experiences and the roller coaster of how hard this was on her as a mother and her family:

"I remember the day I got a call from my son Jason and he said, "mom, I'm following in dad's footsteps". I didn't fully understand what my son meant by that. A year later, I understood what Jason's call was about. His addiction was out of control, and out of my control.

As the mother of Jason, I helped him all the ways I could. In 2015, Jason's baby girl came, and I hoped this would be enough for his addiction to stop. This is every parent's dream, their constant hope.

In 2016, I began attending an Al-Anon group (support for families of people suffering from addictions). This helped and I began the journey of recognizing I have no control over his addiction. I stopped enabling Jason. My heart ached every day. I was overwhelmed over helping him. I was so stressed out that he had no home and no food. Knowing my son had pain during his addiction, I wanted to take it all away. I was trying to keep our family balanced. Being the mother to Jason and his younger sister. Supporting each other as best as we could through the dark times. Not ever knowing if Jason was safe. It kept us on our toes 24/7. Suddenly hearing the phone ring, or a knock on the door anytime.

Then Jason went into recovery from his substance use (got clean and sober) and we had some peace of mind. We prayed that would be his best chance to become healthy 100%. We had hope. We felt proud and even joy, as Jason had a home, a family and a job again.

But despite all these things, within a month we lost him."



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Jason Steven Gage Doolan's final artwork of his graffiti tag, in memory of the light and strength that came out of the challenges from his recovery.

Jason's story and his struggle with addictions, his strength in his recovery, and his sudden overdose has had deep impact on and continues to for his mother, family, and our community. It is our hope, through coming together, learning about the opioid overdose crisis and harm reduction, having open conversations, staying updated on drug check alerts, and reaching out for support when needed, that we can actively play a part in overdose prevention in our community, and support ourselves and those who are struggling with addictions lead towards a path of healing and recovery.



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Harm Reduction Resources

Here are a number of resources and links to more information:

First Nations Health Authority - Harm Reduction Resources

Harm reduction is a public health approach that saves lives by minimizing harm and potential danger. A harm reduction approach meets people where they are at with open arms, acceptance and compassion – not judgment or shame. A harm reduction approach recognizes that every life is valuable and that substance use and addiction are complex and challenging.

People who struggle with addiction need to be supported, not judged. Stigma around drug use can actually cause more deaths, as shamed people can become more reluctant to discuss their challenges with addiction or seek medical help. At the FNHA, we see drug use as a health issue rather than a moral issue. We encourage you to adopt a harm reduction approach in your life and to have conversations about how to keep yourself, family members and friends safe.

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use/overdose-information>

First Nations Health Authority (PDF Documents)

PDFs are also available to download on our TWN Website Mental Wellness Page:
<https://twnation.ca/health-wellness/mental-wellness/>

Talking About Substance Use

<https://twnation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FNHA-Talking-About-Substance-Use-Infosheet.pdf>

5 Myths About Addictions

<https://twnation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FNHA-Myths-About-Addiction-Factsheet.pdf>



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Overdose Prevention FAQs

<https://twnation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FNHA-Overdose-Prevention-FAQs.pdf>

Indigenous Harm Reduction in Action: Community Wellness Education Guide

<https://twnation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FNHA-VCR-Indigenous-Harm-Reduction-Guide.pdf>



"For all the years that I was struggling with drug abuse I was a lost warrior. It was culture and my community that helped me find myself and become the warrior that I am today."

SHANE BAKER
GITXSAN NATION

**Start the conversation about drug use.
Talk to your family and friends.**

The First Nations Health Authority encourages destigmatizing conversations among family members and friends around drug use.

- Be there for each other - reach out to your family and Nation members who may need to hear a familiar voice
- Learn about harm reduction and how it can save lives
- Get a naloxone kit, add it to your first aid kit - it's free
- If you see someone having an overdose: Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number.
- To speak with a nurse about non-emergency overdose prevention: Call 8-1-1 or visit your local health centre.

 

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES VISIT US ONLINE:
fnha.ca/overdose gov.bc.ca/overdose



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Dr. Nel Wieman – Responding to Overdose with Compassion - FNHA

The key to responding to the overdose crisis is a sense of compassion towards people who are experiencing addiction – an understanding that every life is valuable and that addiction is complex and challenging.

"Harm reduction is all about meeting people where they're at with kindness and with respect," says Dr. Wieman. "With COVID-19 the slogan essentially became 'we're all in this together.' When it comes to people who use substances, the thinking is 'I'm glad it's you and not me'".

"We need to change that with compassion. To say, we are all in this together with the opioid crisis. These are our family members, our friends. We need to fight that stigma and reduce the suffering and the losses that are related to the opioid crisis."

<https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/using-compassion-to-tackle-the-stigma-of-addiction>

FNHA Harm Reduction Video Series - Taking care of each other

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/mental-wellness-and-substance-use/overdose-information/support-others>

Video 1: Harm Reduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWFQP0FM9no>

Video 2: Indigenizing Harm Reduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pA3PyaksBYo>

Video 3: Resisting Stigma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LFMXPHrtE8>

Video 4: Hopes for the Future

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hQ_hrs2q_k



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External Resources

Al-Anon Family Support Groups

This is a program that started in conjunction with Alcoholics Anonymous for the families of people struggling with substances. They have the similar meetings, where family members can get peer support, talk about what's going on for them, and learn the AA steps of recovering from alcoholism. Addictions is a family illness and affects all the family members impacted by the person in addiction.

<https://al-anon.org/newcomers/>

Video with Dr. Gabor Mate

Dr. Gabor Mate discusses his work in the Downtown Eastside and what is at the heart of addiction to substances - trauma.

*Warning – potentially triggering content:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys6TCO_olOc

Vancouver Coastal Health – Harm Reduction

<http://www.vch.ca/public-health/harm-reduction>

Toward The Heart

<https://towardtheheart.com/about>

Lifeguard App for Overdose Prevention

<http://www.phsa.ca/about/news-stories/news-releases/2020-news/new-lifeguard-app-launched-to-help-prevent-overdoses>



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Tsleil-Waututh Nation Mental Wellness Team

For questions about Harm Reduction, members are welcome to reach out to:

Lara Fitzgerald, Clinical Lead & Counsellor

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lfitzgerald@twnation.ca

Take care of yourself & one another.

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TWN Health & Wellness Department



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