

March, 2017

BACKGROUNDER: Emergency Overdose Prevention Services – 355 6th St., Courtenay

Between January 1 and December 31 2016, 155 people died from an illicit drug overdose in Island Health. 23 of those deaths were in the North Island region. Vancouver Island had the largest increase in rate of overdose deaths in 2016 compared to 2015 (156%)

To save lives, Island Health in partnership with community organizations, is providing Overdose Prevention Services in Victoria, Nanaimo and Courtenay. Approximately 18 similar Overdose Prevention Services have been opened/are opening in communities across BC, and Port Alberni and Campbell River are in the process of initiating overdose prevention services. These services will be in effect for as long as they are needed and/or until permanent supervised consumption services can replace them.

The Courtenay-based Overdose Prevention Service began operating on March 27. The service is being operated by AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI) with funding from Island Health. AVI added the overdose prevention service to existing services available at 355 6th St. Courtenay, including a range of health and harm reduction services.

The overdose prevention services will be available during regular business hours, Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (closed from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. for lunch). Weekend opening hours are anticipated in the next month. Staff at the site are equipped with naloxone, are trained for overdose response, and will be able to intervene in an overdose.

Overdose Prevention Services are allowed by Ministerial Order ([Ministerial Order M488](#)) under the Emergency Health Services Act. This order directs health authorities to provide 'Overdose Prevention Services for the purpose of monitoring persons who are at risk of overdose and providing rapid intervention as and when necessary, as ancillary health services.'

Both Overdose Prevention Services as an emergency measure and supervised consumption services as a sustained intervention are part of a broad overdose response strategy that includes education, prevention, outreach, harm reduction, naloxone kits, counselling, substance use treatment and supports, and access to mental health services.

Island Health is grateful for the ongoing support of the City of Courtenay, the RCMP, BC Ambulance and Courtenay Fire Department in the response to the current opioid overdose crisis in our communities. The creation of overdose prevention services will be one part of a comprehensive set of services intended to reduce the impact of addictions.

More information about the overdose crisis, including supervised consumption services is available on line (www.viha.ca/mho/overdose.htm). Questions about the Overdose Prevention Service can be emailed to scs@viha.ca.