

Thursday, April 14, 2022 | For Immediate Release

Statement from Mayor Helps Marking the Sixth Year of the Declaration of an Overdose Public Health Emergency

VICTORIA, BC — Today Mayor Helps issued the following statement on the overdose public health emergency:

“Victoria City Council has repeatedly called for action on the toxic drug poisoning crisis that is happening in our city and province. We’ve urged both the federal and provincial governments to create more treatment beds, implement safe supply and decriminalize small amounts of drugs for personal use. These actions reduce stigma and they save lives.

“Since the declaration of a public health emergency on April 14, 2016, more than 9,400 people in the province have died, with the majority of deaths taking place in three B.C. cities, including Victoria. Each of these deaths is one more person who will never have a chance for recovery. It’s one more family member lost, with mourning relatives left behind.

“These are preventable deaths. Our health care system fully vaccinated over 90 per cent of British Columbians against COVID-19 in just over a year. We know there is capacity for action. This same level of commitment and action is required to get safe prescription supply into the hands of those who need it, so that a substance use disorder is treated like a medical issue, rather than a criminal issue.

“The supply of illicit drugs in Canada has become so toxic – so poisoned and tainted with fentanyl – that we cannot hope to address the escalating death toll without providing access to a safe, medically-regulated drug supply. This will save lives.

“Today we are six years into an ‘emergency’. In year seven, all levels of government and our health care system must act to address this emergency. We call on the federal government to support our provincial government’s request for an exemption from Health Canada under Section 56(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, to help us meet substance use with the public health approach it deserves. We also call on the federal government to adopt federal Bill C-216. We must get to a point as a society where no one loses their life to a toxic drug supply, and we must get there soon.”

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