

City of Victoria Policy to Address Addictions

A Five Pillars Strategy

A Five Pillars Strategy involves a coordinated, comprehensive approach to addictions that balances public order and public health to create safer and healthier communities. The five pillars approach (prevention; harm reduction; treatment & supportive recovery; housing; and enforcement) is intended to dramatically reduce the amount of on-the-street consumption, drug overdose deaths, and the infection rates for HIV and hepatitis, as well as increase the success rate for addictions recovery.

An underlying principle of this approach is no single agency is responsible for planning and implementation - it requires coordinated efforts of a coalition of organizations within their areas of responsibility and expertise, including: local governments; health authorities; provincial governments; the Federal government; police departments; non-profit, private and inter-faith service agencies; and, the broader community.

Prevention

Prevention refers to education strategies and outreach interventions that help prevent harmful use of alcohol, tobacco and both illegal and prescription drugs. Of the five pillars, prevention requires a long-term commitment and collaboration across all sectors of the community to show significant and sustained results, which results in the greatest impact in minimizing addictions and reducing harm from substance use.

Harm Reduction

A critical goal is to reduce harm to individuals and communities from the sale and use of both legal and illegal substances. The principles of harm reduction require we do no harm to those suffering from substance addiction and we focus on the harm caused by problematic substance use, rather than substance use per se. It is critical to integrate harm reduction with treatment and prevention to break the cycle of addiction and harm individuals inflict on themselves.

Treatment

The treatment pillar includes a range of interventions and support programs to engage people with addiction problems in processes that explore the roots of an individual's addiction and move them towards making healthier decisions about their lives. An important dimension to this is supportive recovery, which also requires safe, adequate and affordable housing.

Housing

The availability of safe, affordable quality housing is considered the 'glue' that holds much of this strategy together. For example, homelessness is considered a major contributing risk factor in the increased harm and cycle of addictions many individuals face.

Enforcement

The enforcement pillar of the strategy recognizes the need for peace, public order and safety in our communities. While policing alone is not an effective solution to addressing a community's addictions problems, it is an important element to an integrated approach that should also include prevention, treatment, and harm reduction.

The Five Pillars Strategy – Roles and Mandates

Local Government

The City's role is to provide advocacy in the development and implementation of a Five Pillars Drug Strategy, beginning with adoption of the Five Pillars strategy by City Council. The City is responsible for a range of services that contribute to community and individual well-being and support four pillars implementation, including:

- community centres, neighbourhood houses and programs in the downtown core;
- affordable housing policy and financial support through the Victoria Housing Fund;
- community, safety and public order (through funding to the Police Department); and
- enforcement of building, zoning and business by-laws to reduce the impact of drug trafficking and businesses that depend on the drug trade.

Provincial Health Authority

The Health Authority is responsible for health policy and health care services associated with the implementation of the Five Pillars Drug Strategy, in coordination with other Four Pillars partners. This includes integrated work on three pillars - harm reduction, prevention and treatment.

Services the health authority is responsible for include:

- primary health care;
- needle exchange;
- withdrawal management (detox) and drug treatment programs;
- counselling;
- methadone maintenance programs;
- youth alcohol and drug services; and
- prevention services.

The Police Department

The Police Department is primarily responsible for the enforcement pillar of the Five Pillars Drug Strategy, in coordination with other Five Pillars partners. The Police Board, under the authority of the *BC Police Act*, governs the department. To support the Five Pillars Drug Strategy, the police department:

- targets organized crime, drug dealing and drug houses and problem businesses involved in the drug trade; and
- improves coordination with health services and other agencies that link drug users to withdrawal management (detox), treatment, counselling and prevention services.

Capital Region Housing Corporation

The Capital Region Housing Corporation is a non-profit provider affordable housing in the Capital Regional District for families and singles with low to moderate incomes and persons in receipt of a disability income.

Provincial Government

In addition to health authorities, the Provincial Government provides a wide range of social, housing and health services through its ministries and related organizations.

Other Organizations

Service providers, such as AIDS Vancouver Island, are actively involved in the harm reduction component through contracts with the Health Authority. Other agencies provide supports, such as supportive housing and secondary needle collection.