

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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News Release

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International Overdose Awareness Day: UBCIC Calls for Urgent Action by All Levels of Government

(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tsleil Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – August 31, 2022) The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) observes International Overdose Awareness Day and mourns the over 10,000 lives lost to drug poisoning since April 2016.

As with so many crises, First Nations people and communities are overrepresented and disproportionately harmed due to the ongoing and intersecting impacts of colonialism. In 2021, First Nations people were 5.4 times more likely to fatally overdose than other BC residents, while First Nations women died at almost 10 times the rate of other female residents. After six years of insufficient government responses, this crisis continues to escalate, fracturing and traumatizing individuals, families, and communities.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President stated “The overdose crisis is a symptom of unaddressed, long-term problems that only holistic and systemic changes can address. The recent BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel report highlighted the links between overdoses, poverty, and housing instability as well as mental health conditions. We call for safe and affordable housing, mental and physical health systems free from racism and discrimination, accessible socio-economic services to support people in crisis, and a full spectrum of culturally appropriate substance use services to meet the needs of all people who use drugs.”

“For First Nations people, substance use is deeply linked to the legacy and ongoing impacts of colonialism,” said Chief Don Tom, UBCIC Vice-President. “This intergenerational trauma is still very present and is triggered daily by the racism and discrimination our peoples face across society. Ending this ongoing emergency and the poisoning of our people requires collective effort to address the colonial legacy that has shaped society’s institutions and ensures the ongoing marginalization, exclusion, and oppression of First Nations people.”

“Nowhere is the severity of this crisis more visible than the Downtown Eastside, where the unhoused community is facing displacement from the streets without available housing, threats and violence from the public, heatwaves, shootings by police, disappearances and murders of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people, and multiple fires in Single Room Occupancy buildings,” concluded Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer. “We are outraged by this human rights crisis and demand that Vancouver, British Columbia, and Canada work collaboratively with First Nations to preserve the lives and dignity of this community. We will continue to advocate and support those families who lost loved ones to overdoses for meaningful change in all our communities and Nations.”

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UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

For more information, please visit www.ubcic.bc.ca