



Harm Reduction at UBCO

Report on a Campus Health Initiative

In response to the increasing rate of drug overdoses across BC, Campus Health partnered with students to establish a Harm Reduction Team (HaRT) to build on existing strategies to strengthen harm reduction services on campus and in the community.

Voice
CAMPUS HEALTH PROJECT



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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The Opioid Epidemic

In April 2016, the Public Health Officer of British Columbia declared a state of emergency in response to the increasing rate of drug overdoses. Increased awareness and harm reduction efforts contributed to a decline in overdose deaths during 2017-18. However, 2020 was British Columbia's deadliest year for illicit drug toxicity deaths with a total of 1,716 reported deaths, equating to 4.7 deaths per day. This is staggeringly higher than 2019 with a 74% increase. For the first time since 2018, British Columbia had subsequent months with over 100 overdose deaths.¹

The Opioid Epidemic at UBCO

In response to the opioid crisis, Campus Health's Harm Reduction Team (HaRT) has been holding regular dialogues with the UBCO community to find out how they have been impacted by the epidemic. Six of these community dialogues were held in July and November 2020 to discuss how substance use, the opioid crisis and COVID-19 were affecting the UBCO community. These dialogues uncovered:

- significant substance use stigma
- insufficient resources and support
- a need for greater substance use education
- COVID-19 stressors were leading to an increase in substance use

Following these dialogues, HaRT launched several initiatives to address the UBCO community's concerns. In addition to the work they were already conducting (e.g., overdose awareness and prevention, naloxone training and distribution, lower-risk partying workshops), the team launched an anti-stigma campaign to foster compassionate discussion and disclosure of substance use concerns. To provide education on substance use, HaRT began regular classroom presentations, workshops, and social media engagement.

Acknowledgements



This report prepared on behalf of the Harm Reduction Team (HaRT) by Rebekah Underhill, HaRT Harm Reduction Specialist and MSW student, and Lauren Airth, HaRT Project Manager and Campus Health Specialist, UBC Okanagan.

We want to acknowledge all of the UBCO undergraduate and graduate students over the past year that have contributed to this work.

Finally, this work would not have been possible without the guidance and support of Interior Health, and the valuable advice provided by our campus community.



Harm Reduction Services

HaRT's multi-faceted harm reduction service was enhanced through a partnership with Interior Health that began with discussions in October 2020. With the support of Interior Health, HaRT now provides confidential drug-checking services using Fourier Transformed Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) analysis, and test strips for fentanyl and benzodiazepines. When someone provides a sample for FTIR analysis, the technician can find the concentration of various components in the sample (for anything present in a concentration of 5-10% or greater). Sensitive test strips can detect fentanyl and benzodiazepines at lower concentrations, so these are used in conjunction for optimal results. Testing services are offered alongside counselling where individuals can discuss drug use, and information is provided on overdose prevention and lower-risk substance use. Referrals to other health services are also offered. By providing this information to people who use drugs, they can choose to use their substances in a more informed and lower-risk way, and prevent overdose and other complications.

Accessing HaRT's Harm Reduction Services

HaRT's harm reduction services, including drug checking, are open to everyone - not just UBCO students. The team can provide naloxone training and distribution, take-home fentanyl test strips, referrals to support services, sterile supplies, substance use education, and more. Anyone can text or call the HaRT phone at 250-864-1431 to arrange for a sample drop off/pick up or to obtain more information about our services.

When and Where to Find HaRT

These hours and locations are relevant as of February 18th 2021.

Tuesdays - Vernon

- 11:30am - 2:30pm Vernon Downtown Mental Health & Substance Use (3306A 32nd Ave). Contact Mental Health & Substance Use (250-503-3737) to drop off samples outside of HaRT hours.

Wednesdays - Kelowna

- 10:00am - 1:00pm UBCO, UNC, Room ??
- 2:00pm - 6:00pm Living Positive Resource Centre (255 Lawrence Ave.) Contact Living Positive Resource Centre (778-753-5830 or info@lprc.ca) to drop off samples outside of HaRT hours.

Saturdays - Penticton

- 10:00am - 3:00pm The Centre, in the Cannery Building (1475 Fairview Rd.). Samples can be dropped off at Burdock House (594 Winnipeg Street, 236-422-1601) throughout the week.

For information about how to package samples, please review this [document](#).



To contact Campus Health HaRT with questions or to provide feedback please email: campushealth.ubco@ubc.ca.

Reference

1. BC Coroners Service. (2020). *Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths in BC January 1, 2010 – December 31, 2020*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf>