

For Immediate Release | December 13, 2016

Interior Health implementing overdose prevention sites to address ongoing increases in overdoses in Kamloops and Kelowna

As part of the province-wide effort to reduce the number of people dying of drug overdoses, Interior Health will be implementing four overdose prevention sites later this week. In partnership with local contracted harm reduction agencies, ASK Wellness Society and Living Positive Resource Centre, two sites in Kamloops and two sites in Kelowna will be fully operational by December 16, 2016.

The Kamloops sites will be run by Ask Wellness Society, with one on the North Shore and the other on the South Shore. The Kelowna sites will be located at Living Positive Resource Centre and the recently vacated, former Kelowna Health Centre site. Staff at all sites will be equipped with naloxone and have the appropriate training for overdose response.

“In the wake of a spike in overdose-related 911 calls, and in light of the current cold snap across the province, health authorities are moving quickly to set up overdose prevention sites in communities where a significant number of people have been suffering overdoses,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “We needed to act quickly with this emergency measure to help save people’s lives, which is our foremost concern as we continue our work to combat the overdose crisis.”

The opening of overdose prevention sites is supported by a ministerial order issued on December 9, 2016 under the Emergency Health Services Act and Health Authorities Act. The order directs that health authorities establish overdose prevention sites based on the advice of the Provincial Health Officer in locations of very high risk during the public health emergency declared under B.C.’s Public Health Act in April, 2016.

“IH continues to see dramatic increases in both fatal and non-fatal overdose events, and we need to ensure people are safe right now. These overdose prevention sites can help provide increased clinical support and save lives.” said Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Trevor Corneil. “While Kamloops and Kelowna have the highest number of overdose deaths, we recognize overdoses are on the rise in communities across Interior Health. Therefore, we will continue to closely monitor other hot spots or areas of concern.”

Unlike supervised consumption services, which offer a range of prevention, harm reduction and other health services such as addictions care, the purpose of overdose prevention sites is to increase the likelihood trained staff are able to intervene with naloxone and breathing support when an overdose occurs, and prevent catastrophic brain injury and death.

Health authorities continue their work to apply for permanent supervised consumption services, which will have supervision services integrated and embedded with other health and social services, including mental health and substance use services and referrals and peer support.

The Kamloops and Kelowna overdose prevention sites, as well as sites in Vancouver, Surrey, Victoria, and Prince George, are the provincial government’s latest steps in response to the opioid overdose crisis. In July 2016, Premier Christy Clark appointed a Joint Task Force on Overdose Response to provide expert leadership and advice to the Province on additional actions to prevent and respond to overdoses in B.C. As part of the response, law enforcement is working at all levels of government to intercept and block the supply of toxic drugs, and health officials are working to address the immediate and longer-

term health needs. To that end, B.C. is expanding access to life-saving naloxone, supervised consumption services, and opioid addiction treatment medications and services, as well as improving the effectiveness of addiction treatment and access to appropriate substance use supports.

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