



May 11, 2020

# Community Update

## Interior Health to expand mental health and substance use services in downtown Vernon

VERNON – Following extensive consultation and planning, Interior Health (IH) is expanding mental health and substance use services at the Downtown Primary Care Centre in Vernon. Overdose prevention services will be offered alongside enhanced mental health and substance use services at the site.

Over the past year, IH has worked with community members in Vernon to understand perspectives and questions about mental health and substance use services, with a specific focus on overdose prevention.

During the engagement process, IH consulted with: members of Vernon City Council; the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce executive leadership; Downtown Vernon Association executive; local first responders; and the Vernon Community Action Team/Harm Reduction Action Team. Letters inviting input were also sent to the Shuswap North Okanagan Division of Family Practice, the Okanagan Indian Band, and Splots'in First Nation. We attended the Town Hall in June, and have also heard from people with lived experience about what would best support their needs.

Clear throughout the feedback is agreement by a majority of stakeholders that there is a strong need for overdose prevention services in Vernon, in light of the ongoing overdose crisis. In 2019, there were 15 deaths in Vernon due to overdose. There have been four overdose deaths in the first three months of 2020.

Through the engagement process, many people asked questions about the location of services and asked IH for consideration of overall community safety. Some community members questioned whether locating the overdose prevention service downtown or near other social services would lead to increased loitering and public drug use in these areas. Some suggested it be located within IH's health-care facilities, such as a hospital or health centre. Other feedback highlighted the need for open communication, engagement, risk management and security.

This feedback has informed IH planning and the decisions about how mental health and substance use services will be offered in the downtown Vernon area, while at the same time ensuring local concerns about community safety are addressed.

Staff working at the Centre have a high level of expertise and are familiar with clients and the local environment.

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The Downtown Primary Care Centre is open Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. It is located at 3306A 32nd Ave., Vernon.

Neighbours of the Centre are being notified of the plans, and IH will hold a public open house in the future, pending COVID-19 restrictions being lifted.

Interior Health looks forward to the implementation of successful overdose prevention services that balance the needs of clients and others in the community, while ultimately saving lives.

For more information, visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca).

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