



News release

Feb. 18, 2025

Toxic drug crisis speaker series: Services and evidence

Every day brings the death of at least five more people in BC from a toxic drug crisis that shows little sign of abating. It will soon be nine years since the BC government declared a state of emergency over fentanyl-related deaths. What steps are we taking to address the crisis here in our region – and are they working?

Join Peers Victoria on **Wednesday, Feb. 26, 3-6 p.m.**, for an educational afternoon exploring some of the region's most targeted services intervening to reduce the harms of BC's toxic drug supply, and the evidence that does – or doesn't – support the work being done in the province to combat the crisis.

The Feb. 26 conversation is the second in Peers Victoria's three-event speaker series, "Out of Harm's Way: Insight, Innovation and Action to End the Toxic Drug Crisis." All events are open to the public and free. The series is an exceptional opportunity to learn more about a complex, politicized and misunderstood crisis that has killed 21,000 people in BC since 2016.

The afternoon will open with keynotes from Dr. Ashley Heaslip, Island Health's Medical Director for Addictions Medicine, and community social impact leader Trevor Botkin. People working on the front lines of the toxic drug crisis will then share some of their successes, challenges and hopes for the future in a lineup that includes information on the work of:

- Doctors for Safer Drug Policy
- Overdose prevention in supportive housing – Housing Overdose Prevention and Peer Services
- The Harbour safe consumption site
- SAFER drug substitution program
- First Nations Health Authority toxic drug response
- Umbrella Society and paths to recovery

Our second dialogue that day will look at what the evidence says about effective ways to reduce the terrible toll of the toxic drug crisis. Harm Reduction Nurses' Association President Corey Ranger will lead a dialogue with Island Health Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Reka Gustafson; University of Victoria researcher Karen Urbanoski, Canada Research Chair in Substances, Addictions and Health Services; and Jeanette Bowles, University of BC research scientist in the Department of Medicine, BC Centre on Substance Use.

- **When: Wednesday, Feb. 26, 3-6 p.m.**
- **Where: First Metropolitan church sanctuary, 932 Balmoral Road (entrance on Quadra St)**
- **Admission: Free**

Coming up at our final event in the series on **Wednesday, March 26, 2-5 p.m.**: A look at recovery and treatment. Harm reduction and recovery advocate Guy Felicella will lead a dialogue among people with lived experience sharing what recovery looks like in their own lives.

Don't miss this opportunity to learn the facts about a preventable public health crisis that is now second only to cancer as the primary killer of British Columbians. Visit the [Peers Victoria website](#) for more information about the toxic drug crisis and speaker series.

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For more information and to set up interviews with presenters:

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