HARM REDUCTION Q&A

LIFT COMMUNITY SERVICES

Why is there so much concern about overdose?

Overdose is now the leading cause of unnatural death in BC (ages 10–59). In the unregulated drug supply, substances like fentanyl and other contaminants can appear in unknown amounts, increasing the risk of fatal overdose. You are at risk of a fatal overdose even if you use occasionally, or even one time. More than 15,000 people have died of toxic drugs in BC since 2016.

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a substance up to 100 times stronger than morphine, used medically for severe pain. Even small amounts of fentanyl, used outside of a medicalized setting, can be deadly. Fentanyl is often used as a filler in other unregulated substances. It's invisible to sight, smell or taste, putting anyone – especially occasional users – at high risk of overdose.

What does "the unregulated drug supply" mean?

Street drugs are made and sold with no oversight—people don't know what's in them or how strong they are. This significantly increases the risk of health complications, overdose, and death. Legal regulation could provide safe, licensed, medical-grade drugs—much like alcohol, cannabis, or prescription medications.

Do Overdose Prevention Sites give out free drugs?

No. Our Overdose Prevention Site is a supervised space where people bring their own substances. Our iOAT program uses prescribed medications in a clinical setting. We do not provide street drugs.

What about safe supply - doesn't Lift provide that?

No. We wish we could! Safe supply means regulated, legal substances in known quantities. Canada's street drugs are completely unregulated and unpredictable, which increases associated risks of use.

What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction is a public health approach aimed at reducing harms related to everyday activities, including the harms associated with drug use. Examples of harm reduction are naloxone to reverse overdoses; drug checking and testing; clean needles and pipes; and overdose prevention sites.

Is harm reduction anti-recovery?

No. Harm reduction makes recovery more possible by keeping people alive, stable, and connected to supports. People are more likely to change their substance use habits when they feel supported — not punished or judged.

Is harm reduction an appropriate use of taxpayer money?

Yes! Harm reduction programs and supports save lives and money. They reduce overdoses, ambulance calls, and hospitalizations. Harm reduction keeps people alive, connected, and able to access treatment. Harm reduction is part of a spectrum of substance use care that also includes detox, treatment, and recovery-based resources. We need them all.

Why not just tell people to stop using or go to treatment?

“Just stop” doesn’t work. Substance use, and a person’s ability to access care and treatment, is shaped by trauma, health, poverty, colonization, and systemic barriers. People are most likely to reduce or stop substance use when they feel safe and supported. And treatment alone is not enough - we need compassionate policies, social supports, and affordable housing to truly address this crisis.

But drug use is bad?!

Is it? Labelling drug use as bad is an over-simplification of the issue and the people involved. The reasons people use are varied and complex, and include biology, trauma, poverty, homelessness, colonization, pain, mental health, and more. We need to reframe substance use disorder as a systemic and policy failure - not a personal one.

Learn more at www.liftcommunityservices.org/harm-reduction

HARM REDUCTION SAVES LIVES