

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

FOUNDING HEAD OFFICE
209 - 345 Chief Alex Thomas Way
Kamloops, B.C. V2H 1H1
Tel: 250-828-9746
Fax: 250-828-0319



VANCOUVER OFFICE
401 - 312 Main Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6A 2T2
Tel: 604-684-0231
Fax: 604-684-5726
1-800-793-9701
Email: ubcic@ubcic.bc.ca
Web: www.ubcic.bc.ca

Statement

August 31, 2021

International Overdose Awareness Day: B.C. Must Accelerate Action to End Deadly Opioid Overdose Crisis

((X^wməθk^wəy^əm (Musqueam), Sk^wxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səilwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – August 31, 2021) The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) observes International Overdose Awareness Day with sadness and compassion, and we send our thoughts and prayers to all those impacted by the intensifying opioid public health emergency that is continuing to devastate and endanger the lives of Indigenous peoples across the province.

In light of the rising illicit drug overdoses, drug poisonings, and fentanyl detected deaths in B.C., UBCIC is calling upon provincial government and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to take effective and immediate action to address the socioeconomic factors that make First Nations more vulnerable to drug abuse and addiction, including ensuring that First Nations have immediate access to culturally appropriate mental health and addiction services on an as-needed basis, and addressing economic security at the Nation level by respecting Indigenous Title and Rights. Indigenous peoples continue to be disproportionately impacted by the opioid overdose crisis and have for far too long borne the brunt of addiction, substance abuse, and unhealthy coping mechanisms that are tied to the colonial legacy of intergenerational trauma and discrimination. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated the impacts of the crisis and led to a marked increase in overdose deaths; the [BC Coroners Services reported](#) that a record-breaking 1,716 people died of illicit drug overdoses in 2020, a 74% increase in deaths over 2019.

As 2021 is on its way to becoming another year of tragic fatalities, it is imperative that the Province, in addition to its phased implementation of its [new prescribed safer supply policy](#), provides Indigenous peoples with greater access to naloxone kits, safe injection sites, safe disposal of unused prescriptions, and treatment and prevention programs that integrate Indigenous cultural knowledge and values. Today serves as a reminder to the Province that they must work to bring greater visibility to the overdose crisis and reduce the negative stigma around drugs that is used to discriminate against Indigenous peoples.

UBCIC continues to support First Nations in responding to the public health crisis and looks forward to welcoming Dr. Gabor Maté to the virtual [UBCIC Annual General Assembly](#) on September 28th, where he will be discussing the opioid crisis and its impacts on First Nations.

-30-

Media inquiries:

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President, 250-490-5314

Chief Don Tom, Vice-President, 250-813-3315

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer, c/o 778-866-0548

UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

For more information please visit www.ubcic.bc.ca