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Sent via email

January 23, 2023

Mayor's Office
830 Cliffe Avenue
Courtenay BC V9N 2J7
Email: mayor@courtenay.ca

Dear Mayor Wells and Council:

Re: Overdose Prevention Site and Services in Comox Valley

Thank you for your letter dated December 22, 2022 presenting the resolution passed at Courtenay City Council, calling for Island Health to provide an Overdose Prevention Service with inhalation in the City.

Island Health is committed to providing Overdose Prevention Services including inhalation in Courtenay - this service is a priority action in our service plan. We are grateful for the City's support of this life-saving service, and for your commitment to work with us to find a suitable location for this vital program.

Island Health currently offers Overdose Prevention Services (OPS) at 941 England Street. Unfortunately, this service supports injection consumption only. We recognize providing inhalation (smoking) OPS is a priority, as the preferred consumption method has changed from injection to inhalation.

Island Health has been searching for a suitable, dignified, safe and client-centered site for over a year. This search has included a Request for Proposal process. Unfortunately, no suitable proposal was received and, as a result, the organizations that submitted proposals were notified the RFP process would not proceed. As is the case for all Island Health RFPs, proponents can request feedback on their submissions. After the RFP closed, a direct site search led by Island Health's real estate and capital specialists ensued. A range of sites were considered and an ideal site was identified. Unfortunately, the landlord was unwilling to lease the site for Island Health services that included OPS.

Island Health has budget available and earmarked for inhalation OPS, and the real estate search is ongoing.

We want to thank the City of Courtenay for lending the time and expertise of your staff in this ongoing search. We have met with City Manager Geoff Garbutt and Interim Director of Recreation Craig Rushton to explore other potential interim and longer-term site options – including City-owned property – to no avail. We appreciate the conversation about future planning as new development opportunities arise, and look forward to continued conversation around any opportunities to situate a permanent OPS site that includes inhalation.

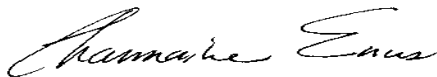
As a more immediate, interim measure Island Health is exploring a temporary structure for inhalation co-located with the current OPS. Planning is in process and landlord approval would be required. We will keep the City updated of progress and request any required support around approvals or permits should that be needed. If this temporary structure becomes possible, it could become permanent once the Community Health Services building becomes vacant. Meanwhile, Island Health's mobile outreach team provides episodic OPS and witnessed consumption (injection and inhalation) to any individual who requests it. This team currently operates 5 day/week; we are working on additional staffing to extend hours and days of service. We are planning for set hours and locations in the community and supports to all sites where these services are required. This service expansion includes four additional peer support workers to provide outreach services.

Lastly, Island Health remains in contact with BC Housing, and plans to have further discussion with them to commission an OPS offering injection and inhalation if they secure acquisition of the Travel Lodge in Courtenay.

Again, thank you for the City's support for inhalation overdose prevention services. We are grateful the City recognizes the importance of these services as one response mechanism to the toxic drug crisis and the societal issues of substance use, poverty and homelessness.

We will be meeting with City staff regularly to provide updates and would be pleased to provide updates to Mayor and Council as needed and requested. Please to not hesitate to reach out to either of us directly or by e-mail with questions, concerns or site tips!

Yours in health,



Charmaine Enns, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer



Lesley Howie, Director North Island MHSU

Cc: Sheila Leadbetter, Executive Director Mental Health Substance Use
South/Centre/North Island & Tertiary Adults and Seniors Services, Island Health