

The History of Harm Reduction in British Columbia



For a definition of Harm Reduction please see [Health file #102 Understanding Harm Reduction](#).

1964

- First Methadone Treatment program began in Canada, run by the Addiction Research Foundation in Ontario. Soon programs were established across Canada including BC.
For MMT timeline see page 7

1984

- *First needle exchange in the world is launched* in Amsterdam, Netherlands
- *Mersey Model of harm reduction initiated* in Merseyside, UK
- First time multiple harm reduction strategies were used systematically in a single location to reduce the harms associated with a drug use epidemic
- Included a needle exchange program, counseling, prescribing drugs (e.g., opiates) and employment/housing services

Mid - 1980's

- *First legal supervised injection site opens* in Bern, Switzerland

1986

- Illicit drugs could be injected with nursing staff present
- Another supervised injection site in Netherlands is operating at the time, but not under explicit legal support from local authorities

February 1989

- *First Needle Exchange Program in British Columbia*
- The City of Vancouver funds a pilot project for needle exchange delivered via the Downtown East-side Youth Activities Society and the North Health Unit

1990

- *1st International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm* in Liverpool, UK
- Delegates from around the world went to learn about the Mersey Harm Reduction strategy

1996

- *Vancouver Injection Drug Users Study*
- The BC Centre for Excellence HIV and AIDS commences longitudinal study of people who inject drugs
- Six monthly interviews about drug use practices, health status, health and social service utilization, HIV and hepatitis C testing

1997

- *Public health emergency declared in Vancouver*
- The Chief Medical Health Officer of the Vancouver Richmond Health Board declares a public health emergency in response to increasing overdose deaths, hepatitis A, B and C, syphilis and HIV infections

1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users</i>• A peer-based support and education group is formed by people who use illicit drugs to increase their capacity to live healthy and productive lives
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>City of Vancouver's Four Pillar Drug Strategy adopted</i>• Vancouver City Council recommended actions across the four pillars of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Needle distribution replaces needle exchange in BC</i>• Provincial needle distribution policy replaces one-for-one needle exchange programs
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The Dr. Peter Centre provides supervised injection</i>• This follows a ruling by the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia that it was in the scope of nursing practice to supervise injections for the purposes of preventing illness and promoting health
April 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>BC Harm Reduction Program is transferred to the BC CDC</i>• The program is moved from the Ministry of Health Services to the Vaccine and Pharmacy Services, BC Centre for Disease Control, Provincial Health Services Authority
September 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>First officially sanctioned Supervised Injection Site (SIS) in North America opens in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside</i>• Health Canada grants Vancouver Coastal Health a Section 56 exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>World Health Organization supports provision of sterile injecting equipment to reduce HIV transmission</i>¹• The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS and the United Nations General Assembly also endorse Needle Exchange Programs²• Needle Exchange Programs reduce transmission of blood borne disease, unsafe drug use and unsafe sexual behaviours associated with transmission of HIV and Hepatitis C Virus, and the number of discarded needles³• Needle exchange programs do not encourage initiation of drug use, increase duration and frequency of drug use, decrease motivation to reduce drug use among people who use injection drugs³• Needle exchange programs increase access to drug treatment³

April 2004

- ***Harm Reduction Policy Framework unanimously approved in Victoria, BC***
- Framework aimed at managing the harms to the community from substance use and providing the necessary supports for drug and alcohol users
- ***Anti-harm reduction bylaw approved in Abbotsford***
- ***[Abbotsford City Council approved bylaw](#) which prohibits harm reduction, such as needle distribution, in the city***

2005

- ***Enrolment in the NAOMI Trial begins***
- The ***[North American Opiate Medication Initiative \(NAOMI\)](#)*** was a randomized trial testing whether medically prescribed diacetylmorphine, the active ingredient in heroin, offered benefits over and above methadone therapy in the treatment of individuals with chronic opioid dependence

2007

- ***Health Canada disallows compassionate use of heroin for NAOMI participants***
- Canada only country that has terminated the treatment after showing success: ***[Read the news release](#)***
- The study team applies for research funding to continue to investigate effectiveness of licensed injectable opioids (see below, ***[the SALOME trial](#)***)

April 2007

- ***[“Evidence and best practice for the employment of harm reduction activities in programs aimed at controlling communicable diseases”](#)***
- Drs. Thomas Kerr and Evan Wood describe successful supervised injections sites in Europe⁴
- Similar success has been found in Vancouver^{5,6,7,8}

May 2007

- ***[“More than just needles” study](#)***⁹
- A project to evaluate provincial product supply distribution and use of policy, to identify gaps and future demands

May 2008

- ***[“Strategies” Newsletter](#)***
- The newsletter of the Harm Reduction Strategies and Services (HRSS) highlighting the latest information on harm reduction principles, policies and programs in BC is launched
- ***Fixed Needle Exchange closes in Victoria***
- After 20 years of operation, Victoria’s single fixed needle site closes its doors due to pressure from neighbourhood groups.¹⁰

September 2008

- **[“Best practices” document](#)**
- The BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services Committee publishes document to provide guidance to BC’s harm reduction services, supply distribution and collection programs

October 2008

- **[Provincial harm reduction product distribution is centralized](#)**
- Harm reduction supplies now ordered by faxing a supply requisition through the BC CDC
- **[Download the supply requisition by clicking on this link](#)**

January 2009

- **[Two-day harm reduction workshop in Vancouver](#)**
- Hosted by BC Harm Reductions Strategy and Services and the BCCDC Outreach/Street Nurse Program
- 88 participants included front-line staff, peers (people who use drugs) and Aboriginal agency/community representatives

June 2009

- The **[Pacific Summit on Drug User Health](#)**, was organized and hosted by the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users in Vancouver
- **[The BC/Yukon Association of Drug War Survivors](#)** was formed at the summit to strive for social justice and advocate for human rights of people who use drugs (PWUD) and to eliminate the discrimination, criminalization, stigmatization and isolation of PWUD in areas of social, economic and political life.
- Other community-based user groups have formed in BC since this time

July 2009

- **[BC CDC adds Harm Reduction webpage](#)**
- Go to www.bccdc.ca/prevention/HarmReduction

August 2009

- **[BC Harm Reduction Training Manual](#)**
- Hard copies sent to all BC distribution sites and published online for regular updates

April 2011

- **[Funding for local initiatives](#)**
- The HRSS provides Regional Health Authorities funds to support peer-led initiatives for community harm reduction activities and matching funds for community development activities

July 2011

- [***SALOME Trial obtains required approvals to start study***](#)
- The [Study to Assess Long-term Opioid Maintenance Effectiveness \(SALOME\)](#), a clinical trial to determine if hydromorphone (Dilaudid®) benefits people with chronic opioid addiction as much as diacetylmorphine, (active ingredient of heroin), who are not benefiting sufficiently from other treatments¹¹

August 2011

- Survey of [Public Attitudes Towards Harm Reduction](#) was conducted among BC residents. The results show overall 78% support harm reduction; 75% support needle distribution; and 54% support safer inhalation equipment distribution.

September 29,
2011

- [***The Supreme Court of Canada unanimously rules to uphold Insite's exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act***](#)
- Click on the link above for a copy of the Supreme Court judgment; This allows the facility to stay open indefinitely

March 2012

- [***Toward the Heart website***](#)
- The knowledge exchange website by the Harm Reduction Program of the BC CDC is launched at www.towardtheheart.com

August 2012

- A provincial [Take Home Naloxone](#) program was developed for BC. Training and prescribing of naloxone to individuals at risk of overdose began in August 2012.

Harm Reduction Supply Distribution in BC

October 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centralized bulk purchase of syringes• The BC provincial government ensures sufficient numbers of syringes to meet needs of clients in all 14 Needle Exchange Programs in BC
2004/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2.8M needles and 942,000 water vials distributed across BC• BCCDC begins to track the distribution of harm reduction products which is funded by the provincial government and subsidized by the Provincial Health Service Authority
Late 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supplies for safer smoking are added to the provincial harm reduction list i.e. plastic mouth pieces and wooden push sticks
March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cookers and acidifiers are added to the provincial harm reduction supplies distribution list
September 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal sharps containers made available
December 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tourniquets and screens for safer inhalation are added to the provincial harm reduction supplies distribution list
2011 calendar year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6.3M syringes/needles, 2.86M water vials and 3.98M condoms are distributed across the province

The harm reduction supply [requisition form](#) is available on-line at www.bccdc.ca. This form should be used by sites approved by their local health authority HRSS representative. The completed form is faxed to BCCDC.

Timeline of Methadone Maintenance Treatment

1926	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rolleston Report released (United Kingdom): Elite committee of British physicians recognizes opiate addiction as a “manifestation of disease” and that continued administration of opiates by physicians can reduce the morbidity associated with addiction.
1939	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methadone is first synthesized (Germany)
1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Methadone Treatment program begins in Canada: Run by the Addiction Research Foundation in Ontario, they also developed guidelines for “good medical practice” in opiate maintenance treatment.
Late 1960’s/Early 1970’s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) programs become well established across Canada including BC: There are 23 MMT programs in Canada by 1972.
1972	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amendments to the Narcotic Control Act place strict regulations on the prescription of methadone in Canada: All physicians prescribing methadone require authorization from the federal health authorities.
1982	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of patients in MMT drops to 560 in Canada: This represents about a third of the patients registered in 1972, approximately half of whom were registered in BC.
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of patients registered in Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) program in BC is 1,221.
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC takes over management of the Province’s MMT program: Federal authorities pass jurisdiction over MMT to Provincial authorities nationwide.
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of patients registered in MMT program in BC is 8,221: Rapid rise in number of patients in MMT occurs after CPSBC loosens regulations on physician prescribing.
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North American Opiate Medication Initiative (NAOMI) begins. <i>See page 3</i>
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Patients registered in MMT programs in BC is 11,033.
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BC College of Pharmacist require all pharmacist and pharmacists managers to complete MMT Training by September 30 , 2011 to ensure compliance with the Board approved Policies. Once complete pharmacists are required to sign the 'Declaration of Completion and Understanding' form.
December 19 th , 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Patients registered in MMT programs in BC is 13,046

Additional resources:

www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2010/Methadone_maintenance_treatment_review.pdf

http://www.bcpharmacists.org/about_us/key_initiatives/index/articles144.php

References

1. World Health Organization. 2004. *Policy Brief: Provision of sterile injecting equipment to reduce HIV transmission*. Geneva.
2. Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. 2007. *Sticking points: Barriers to access to needle and syringe programs in Canada*. Toronto, Canada.
3. World Health Organization. 2005. *Effectiveness of sterile needle and syringe programming in reducing HIV/AIDS among injecting drug users*. Geneva.
4. Kerr T, and Wood E. 2006. *Evidence and best practice for the employment of harm reduction activities in programs aimed at controlling communicable diseases*. Prepared for the BC Ministry of Health Core Functions in Public Health Project.
5. Kerr T, Small W, Moore D , and Wood E. A micro-environmental intervention to reduce the harms associated with drug-related overdose: Evidence from the evaluation of Vancouver's safer injection facility. *International Journal on Drug Policy*, 2007:18(1), 37–45.
6. Stoltz JA, Wood E , Small W, Li K, Tyndall M, Montaner J, et al. Changes in injecting practices associated with the use of a medically supervised safer injection facility. *Journal of Public Health*, 2007:29(1), 35–39.
7. Milloy MJ, Kerr T, Tyndall M, Montaner J, and Wood E. Estimated drug overdose deaths averted by North America's first medically-supervised safer injection facility. *PLoS ONE*, 2008:3(10), e3351.
8. Wood E, Tyndall MW, Montaner JS, and Kerr T. Summary of findings from the evaluation of a pilot medically supervised safer injecting facility. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 2006:175(11), 1399–1404.
9. Buxton JA, Preston EC, Mak S, Harvard S, Barley J; BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services Committee. More than just needles: an evidence-informed approach to enhancing harm reduction supply distribution in British Columbia. *Harm Reduct J*. 2008 Dec 24;5:37.
10. Failed Mandates: Ministry of Health, VIHA, City of Victoria. Harm Reduction Victoria. Available from: <http://harmreductionvictoria.ca/?q=node/78>
11. SALOME Clinical Trial Questions and Answers. http://www.innerchangefoundation.org/pdf/SALOME_FAQs_v4.pdf [Accessed April 25, 2012].