

## NORTH SHORE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANCE USE

### MISSION STATEMENT

*The North Shore Standing Committee on Substance Use will support community organizations to reduce the impact and incidence of substance abuse on the North Shore through advocacy, collaboration and leadership.*

### MINUTES

**Thursday, March 9, 2023 5:00 – 6:30 pm**  
**In Person – District Hall, 355 West Queens**

#### Members:

Cllr James Hanson, Councillor, DNV  
Cllr Nora Gambioli, Councillor, DWV  
Cllr Holly Back, Councillor, CNV (5:45pm)  
Cllr Jaime Cunliffe, Lions Bay  
Sgt. Mark McLean, West Vancouver Police Department  
Dave Stevenson, School Trustee, WV School District  
Dr. Alexandra Choi, VCH North Shore Medical  
Health Officer

#### Guests:

Dr. Michelle Brousson

#### Regrets:

Cllr Maureen Nicholson, Councillor, Bowen Island  
Chief Jen Thomas, Tsleil-Waututh Nation  
Khelsilem, Council Chairperson, Squamish Nation  
Inspector Vaz Kassam, North Vancouver RCMP  
George Tsiakos, School Trustee, NV School District

#### Staff:

Eirikka Brandson, DNV Staff Liaison  
Lea Shepherd, DWV Staff Liaison  
Heather Evans, CNV Staff Liaison  
Jenelle Simpson, Committee Clerk

### 1. Welcome & Introductions

The Chair called the meeting to order at 5:11 pm.

Members were welcomed and provided a brief introduction.

### 2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Trustee Stevenson moved and Sgt. McLean seconded  
To elect Cllr Hanson as Chair.

Cllr Hanson moved and Dr. Choi seconded  
To elect Trustee Stevenson as Vice Chair.

**CARRIED**

### 3. Adoption of Agenda

Hanson moved and Cllr Gambioli seconded  
To adopt the agenda.

**CARRIED**

### 4. Adoption of Minutes

Hanson moved and Jaime Cunliffe seconded  
To adopt the June 1, 2022 minutes.

**CARRIED**

**5. Vancouver Coastal Health – Updates and discussion (Dr. Alexandra Choi)**

Dr. Alexandra Choi introduced the topic of illicit drug use and explained the correlation between unnatural deaths and the COVID-19 pandemic over the last 3 years. It was displayed that the years 2020-2022 showed a significant jump in overdose toxicity deaths from previous years.

Dr. Choi described who was affected and noted that the North Shore, including Lions Bay and Bowen Island, is quite different than what is seen provincially. Illicit drug toxicity deaths are the second leading cause of deaths, first being cancer. One of the reasons being that the drug supply is changing. Fentanyl is playing a large role, however, there has been an increase in new types of Benzodiazepine since 2018-2019. A few of the hypothesis of why toxicity overdoses got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic include:

- Supply chain disruption, resulting in different drugs being circulated.
- Service disruptions, such as, drug checking and prevention services.
- Increased stress levels and mental health issues.

There was a significant increase in alcohol consumption and alcohol related hospitalizations in all 5 municipalities across the North Shore during the pandemic. Interestingly, this increase is only seen in BC while the rest of Canada has remained stable. One of the reasons for this may be the liberalization of alcohol, such as the allowance to consume in certain parks and increased patio consumption. Dr. Choi expressed an interest in diving into this in more detail in future meetings.

Dr. Choi presented the North Shore preliminary results on illicit drug toxicity deaths and explained the goal and methods used. The number of overdose deaths on the North Shore per year was consistently higher from 2020-2022. Dr. Choi summarized the key demographics and social history of those affected, such as relationship status and living situation. She noted that 38.3% were not previously known to use illegal drugs, and the vast majority, 61.7%, had no history of overdose. Most of these deaths were due to toxic contamination of stimulants because of the illegal and toxic drug supply.

Dr. Choi finished by providing details on the proposed strategies to effectively build a system of care and support. These include prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, systems of support, and overdose response priorities. Dr. Choi emphasized that stigma in the community directly impacts ones willingness to seek help. Therefore, creating awareness and normalizing the issue is paramount.

### **BC Decriminalization of small amounts of certain illicit drugs – Update and discussion (Dr. Alexandra Choi)**

On May 31, 2022, Health Canada approved the provinces exemption request of decriminalization, and it became effective on January 31, 2023. This is in effect for a three year period and will undergo a rigorous evaluation.

Dr. Choi noted that it is important to understand that decriminalization is *not* legalization. The pilot is directed towards the user and is about reducing stigma. The goal is to increase awareness and linkage to care, allowing more people to feel comfortable coming forward for help. Programs and services, such as drug checking, aims to prevent illicit drug toxicity deaths.

It was explained that the intention is to bring illicit drugs closer to the middle of the spectrum, in terms of health and social harms. It would then align more closely with tobacco, alcohol and marijuana, which are currently perceived to have fewer health and social harms.

Dr. Choi provided details on the key features of decriminalization in BC and briefly outlined some of the exceptions to the exemption. She explained that stigma and criminalization drive people to hide their drug use and use alone, which is increasingly more fatal. The exemption aims to diminish this.

The data Dr. Choi presented is currently not publicly available as the numbers are too small and identifiable, creating privacy issues. However, it was suggested that a high-level overview, such as using percentages, is made available. The committee agrees that it is important to increase awareness that illicit drug toxicity deaths happen on the North Shore as well, not just the downtown East side. The following mediums were suggested for exposure:

- Local news.
- Social media.
- Advertisements.

A major cause of substance use and overdose is a breakdown in ones support system. Dr. Choi noted that for every fatal overdose, there are multiple near misses. There is a common assumption that users believe this will not happen to them. Therefore, implementing strategies that make this data known to the community is essential. Overall, the intention of decriminalization is to increase awareness, decrease stigma, and shift the perception of substance use to a health matter.

### **6. Community Projects – Discussion (Dr. Michelle Brousson)**

Dr. Michelle Brousson created the North Shore Community Committee on Substance Abuse. The committee comprises of a variety of groups from different areas of the community, including Vancouver Coastal

Health (VCH). The committee put together a program where VCH will be supporting education on the topic of illicit drug in North Shore schools.

Dr. Brousson described the following committee project ideas:

1. Establish safe inclusive spaces in public.
2. Prepare for overdoses in public spaces.
3. Education on harm reduction for municipal employees.
4. Establish an overdose prevention site on the North Shore.
5. Establish roles for peer support workers in the community.
6. Improve access to mental health and substance use resources for racialized communities.
7. Low-income or supported housing (low-barrier, harm reduction oriented).
8. Local Leadership United (LLU): Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention

There is currently only one overdose prevention site on the North Shore, and it is used approximately 700 times per month. The shelter is small and always full. In addition to a prevention site, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) expressed the need for a meeting place for adults when peer support workers meet with someone at risk.

Dr. Brousson mentioned a public facing campaign around education and de-stigmatization for the general public. She also expressed a need to better connect and support the community and increase education from a young age.

The committee agreed that they would resume this discussion and create an action plan at the next meeting.

## **7. Financial Report (CNV Staff Liaison)**

Ms. Heather Evans stated that the financial report has not been updated since the July 1, 2022 meeting.

## **8. Discussion Topics for Next Meeting**

The following items were presented as possible topics for the next meeting:

- Resume discussion on the North Shore Community Committee on Substance Abuse;
- Members were interested in speaking more about alcohol use;
- Confirm the status of the first 3 topics from Dr. Michelle Brousson's presentation.

## **9. Next Meeting Date**

Eirikka will send a Doodle poll to determine the next meeting date.

**10. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:44 pm.

**CARRIED**