



## **THE COALITION OF PEERS DISMANTLING THE DRUG WAR** **The unceded and stolen homelands of the Coast Salish people, lands belonging to the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam nations**

### **The Coalition of Peers Dismantling the Drug War Communique on the 2020 Overdose Deaths in BC**

***FEBRUARY 2 2021***

The blood 1,716 people who died **PREVENTABLE** deaths in BC in 2020 is on the hands of every level of government in Canada. We resolutely refuse their crocodile tears, and are blasé to their response to this issue. The deaths of our families, our friends, our parents, our children and our community members from overdoses are a result of policies that withhold safer drugs from us and criminalize our bodily autonomy. Overdose deaths are a direct result of government laws and policies that force us to access a dangerous, deadly supply of drugs. Each of these 1,716 deaths should be evidence enough that the government cares more about holding up archaic, racist, and moralistic prohibition laws, than it does about protecting the lives of drug users.

When overdose deaths spiked as a result of the isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of BC pushed through safer supply prescribing guidelines, Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Public Health Emergencies. Many harm reduction advocates and drug users applauded the release of the guide. While the prescribing guidelines are predictably heavily medicalized and restrictive, we supported it as a step towards getting safer drugs into the hands of drug users. The roll out of safer supply has, unfortunately, been slow and ineffective. Only 2780 British Columbians have safer supply prescriptions under the Dual-Risk Mitigation Guidelines. Groundbreaking measures to keep people safe from COVID-19 are happening in every area of our lives, however most drug users accessing safer supply are expected to go to a pharmacy **EVERY DAY** to have access to a script that they cannot use to get high. You treat us like children - but worse - children whose lives are expendable. Daily dispensation programs are a high-barrier requirement that discriminates against people with disabilities, people who are immunocompromised, people who don't have access to transportation, and people who are poor.

Prescribing guidelines for safer supply have been available since March 26 2020, yet 1,716 people died in 2020 from a regulatory system that produces an unpredictable drug supply. This is evidence that this program is not enough. The lack of urgency from every level involved in implementation of life saving measures is criminal. This is what happens when drug users are not in control.

The CPDDW condemns the ongoing criminalization of drug use and drug dealing. We condemn the willful murders of 1,716 of our people. We oppose the pathologization of drug use and we need safer drug programs controlled by drug users in a non-medicalized environment. We demand the repeal the Controlled Drugs and Substance Act (CDSA). We demand the release of all those held in prison under the CDSA and the repeal of their criminal records. We demand the immediate expansion of safer supply programs, including non-prescription drug programs developed by drug users. In honor of each of the 1,716 people who died in BC in 2020 we refuse to ask for anything less.