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VCH and Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation seek exemption for supervised injection services

Vancouver, BC – Vancouver Coastal Health and the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation announced today that they have submitted a formal application to Health Canada for an exemption from federal drug laws to allow the Dr. Peter Centre to continue providing supervised injection services for their clients admitted for care.

The Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation operates the Dr. Peter Centre, an internationally recognized health care facility located in Vancouver, which specializes in providing care for people living with HIV who also face poverty, homelessness and mental health and addiction issues. Two non-fatal overdoses prompted the centre to integrate supervised injection service into the centre's registered nursing practice 12 years ago – the clients had been hiding their drug use from staff. The exemption would apply to staff and registered clients of the centre.

“Research shows that Insite, where people can inject drugs under the supervision of nurses, saves lives and reduces the risk of infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C. This contributes not only to improved health outcomes for participants, but also to the protection of the public and the promotion of important public health objectives,” said VCH Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Patricia Daly. “The Dr. Peter Centre has embedded this approach in their specialized nursing care and day health program, so we expect similar outcomes to Insite, such as preventing any overdose deaths.”

A decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2011 required the federal government to grant a similar exemption and allowed for Insite's continued operation. The court ruled that Insite delivered health benefits without any negative impacts on the community.

“This application addresses the Supreme Court's recommendations and fulfills all requirements for supervised injection services outlined by the Government of British Columbia,” said Dr. Daly.

Supervised injection helps to build a more open, trusting relationship between nurse and client that can increase the likelihood participants will take advantage of counselling and addiction treatment. As many as 63 per cent of the Dr. Peter Centre's supervised injection clients have received addiction counselling and one-third have been referred to withdrawal management or longer-term treatment programs.

“Incorporating supervised injection into nursing services at the Dr. Peter Centre takes people off the street and into health care – it prevents infections, prevents overdose deaths and prevents the spread of disease all while engaging vulnerable people in effective HIV treatment,” said Maxine Davis, executive director, Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation.

The service is officially endorsed and supported by the Government of B.C., City of Vancouver and numerous community organizations.

“The Dr. Peter Centre provides a variety of effective care and treatment services for those living with HIV/AIDS including access to supervised injections,” said Minister of Health Terry Lake. “Our government is committed to providing the best evidence-based

support and care for British Columbians with substance use problems and addictions and we support Vancouver Coastal Health and the Dr. Peter Centre in their application.”

“As the Mayor of Vancouver I am strongly supportive of the Dr. Peter Centre being granted an exemption and continuing to provide supervised injection services for many of our region’s most vulnerable residents,” said Mayor Gregor Robertson. “Supervised injection services both at the Dr. Peter Centre and Insite have become an indispensable public health resource in our community, preventing overdose deaths and the spread of disease. They have also been a vital component of Vancouver’s work to tackle addiction with prevention, treatment, and referrals to additional social and health services.”

VCH is responsible for the delivery of \$3 billion in community, hospital and residential care to more than one million people in communities including Richmond, Vancouver, the North Shore, Sunshine Coast, Sea to Sky corridor, Powell River, Bella Bella and Bella Coola.

The Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation, with funding from VCH and other organizations, operates the Dr. Peter Centre which provides support to some of British Columbia’s most vulnerable citizens who face poverty, homelessness, and mental health and addiction issues in addition to HIV/AIDS. The Centre uses an integrated model to engage individuals in their health care with a specific goal of improved adherence to HIV treatment and overall improved health.

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