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SOCIAL WORK ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER REPORT CALLING FOR SAFE, ALTERNATIVE SUPPLY

(Vancouver) BC's professional social work association is calling on the provincial government to implement Public Health Officer Bonnie Henry's calls for expanded access to safe/alternative supply, culturally safe programs and services, increased substance use treatment and recovery programs, increased mental health services, and more initiatives to address other social determinants of health.

"Bonnie Henry's recommendations come on the heels of retiring Chief Coroner Lisa Lapointe's call for the BC government to act quickly to expand access to safe supply to save lives" said BC Association of Social Workers President Michael Crawford. "Last year, 2,511 British Columbians died as a result of unregulated drugs, a five per cent increase from 2022, and more than 14,000 British Columbians have died from unregulated drugs since the public health emergency was declared in 2016."

Henry is calling for British Columbians to understand substance use as a public health issue and to broaden interventions to include addressing social determinants of health such as housing, and food security. The public health officer noted that Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by the toxic illicit drug supply and that culturally safe programs and service must be created following respectful consultation.

"There is a moral and ethical imperative to act decisively to implement effective and accessible interventions when harms to individuals are certain and severe," said Crawford. "We know that public health interventions may result in some risk of harm to others and that harm must be acknowledged and addressed".

Henry's report emphasized the use of systematic evaluations of programs and services, and evidence-based approaches to ensure effectiveness. She also called for the development of additional clinics staffed by multi-disciplinary teams including social workers to respond more effectively to the drug crisis.

"The report challenges the government to expand the current safe supply program to do more to save lives, reduce harm, and improve physical and mental health," said Crawford. "We need to develop trauma-informed, non-medical models of access to regulated alternatives to the toxic drug supply or we will continue to see record levels of deaths."

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BC Association of Social Workers

The BC Association of Social Workers is a voluntary, not-for-profit membership association that supports and promotes the profession of social work and advocates for social justice. BCASW is one of the provincial/territorial social work associations in partnership with the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW). Through CASW we support the work of the International Federation of Social Workers. BCASW was incorporated in 1956 and has branches and members (including students) throughout BC.

BCASW acknowledges that we work in the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and that our members and colleagues live, work, and play in unceded territories across British Columbia. We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant communities.