



Urban Indigenous Opioid Task Force

The Urban Indigenous Opioid Task Force (UIOTF) is a coordinated response team of stakeholders who collaborate to share information and develop strategies for navigating the opioid crisis in Metro Vancouver. UIOTF was created in response to BC's opioid overdose public health emergency announced in April, 2016. Over 1,000 people have died in 2017 alone making overdoses the leading cause of unnatural death. Many services have been overwhelmed in meeting the high demands this crisis has caused. These providers have an opportunity to share on successful initiatives and identify challenges. This allows members to learn from one another, coordinate efforts, and network. UIOTF supports community engagement and also relieves the pressure of responding to the crisis in isolation.

The Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) is an umbrella organization serving 25 urban Indigenous organizations. MVAEC facilitates and coordinates UIOTF's meetings and operations. The role of MVAEC is to gather information from the group to disseminate to with various groups within the community.

The group includes over 130 representatives from all levels of response including those with lived experience, service providers, and municipal & provincial health authorities. They collectively serve the 70,000 urban Indigenous people living in the Metro Vancouver area.

Meetings are held approximately every six weeks with an average of 40 participants. Since it's operation in June 2017, UIOTF has developed a common vision and goals in the Shared Vision Workshop.

Scope: It is recommended UIOTF adopt a community-based, lifespan approach to support families and address core issues. The target demographic includes anyone using substances containing opioids. These uses may be for medical, recreational, spiritual, and/or maintenance purposes. The scope of UIOTF begins when individuals using these substances access health and community services.

Goals: The UIOTF's top priorities are to reduce overdose deaths, increase access to immediate care, and facilitate smooth transition into a long-term support network by collaboratively sharing information amongst members to create and improve opioid response strategies.

Strong participation has been observed by:

- The City of Vancouver
- First Nations Health Authority
- PHS Community Services Society (Culture Saves Lives)
- BC Centre for Disease Control
- Vancouver Coastal Health (Indigenous Wellness Team)
- Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society
- BC Centre on Substance Use
- Urban Native Youth Association
- Aboriginal Front Door Society
- Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society
- Simon Fraser University (Public Health Department)
- Circle of Eagles Lodge
- Provincial Health Services Authority
- Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre
- Spirit of the Children Society

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Outcomes:

- ✓ Created *UIOTF Information Exchange* to update members on current initiatives responding to the opioid crisis
- ✓ Developed messaging for a five-poster anti-stigma campaign
 - Stigma, Resiliency, Support & Prevention
 - Created *Indigenous Substance Use Guide* featuring 27 key resources
- ✓ Established three Action Groups
 - Advocacy, Awareness & Healing
- ✓ Hosted a *Talking Circle for Frontline Workers* to address burnout and establish community-led recommendations for self-care amidst the crisis
- ✓ *Shared Vision Workshop & Report*
 - Defined UIOTF's vision & scope
- ✓ *Street Outreach Report*
 - Has gathered information on street patrols in Vancouver
- ✓ Collected recommendations to submit to the newly developed Ministry of Mental Health & Addictions

Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Support integrated care, Indigenous wellness centres & wrap around services approach to promote efficiency of service delivery
- ✓ Remove jurisdictional barriers between health authorities
- ✓ Increase access and reduce waitlists for existing services
- ✓ Support *Culture as Treatment* interventions and cultural humility practices
 - Indigenous cultural wellness has shown to be successful for the prevention and treatment of substance use issues

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