

# Powell River's Overdose Crisis since 2016:

## A True Community Response



Maggie Hathaway, City Councilor, City of Powell River  
For UBCM 2022 Harm Reduction Panel

Traditional Territories of the Tla'amin Nation

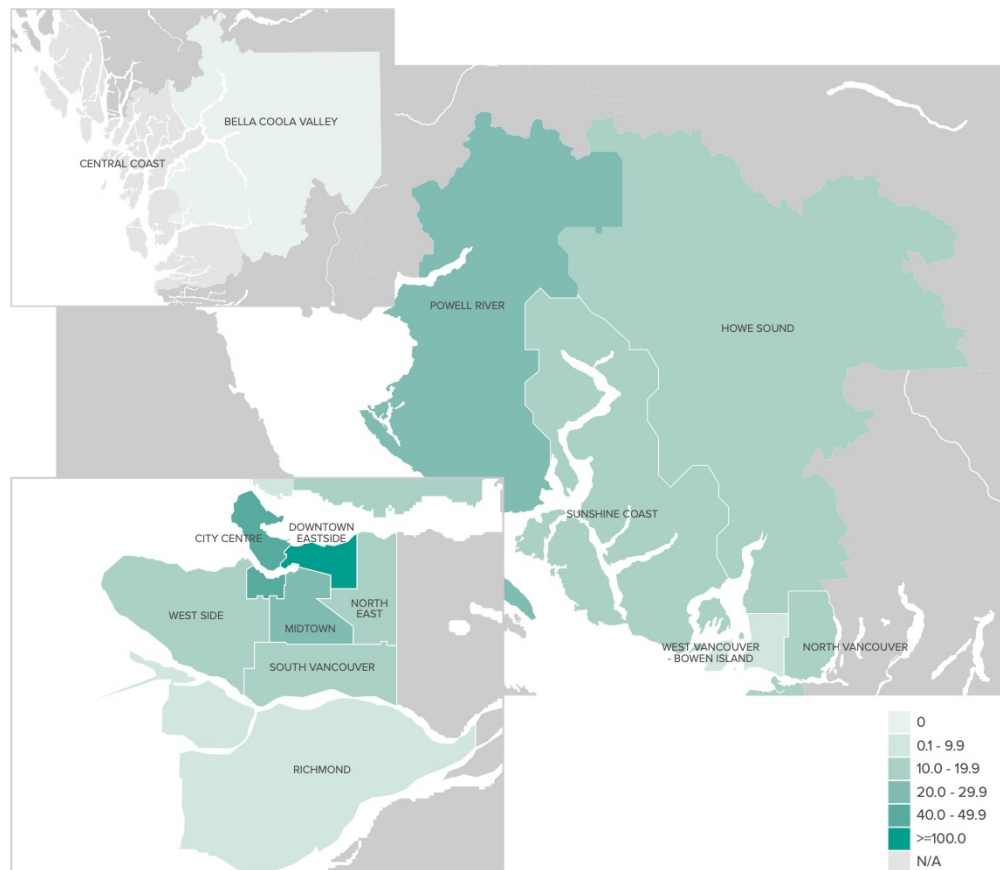
# Key Terms



## Community Action Team

- PEER: Someone with lived/living experience using substances
- OPS: Overdose Prevention Site
- CAT: Community Action Team
- OPIOID AGONIST THERAPY: Medications such as methadone, suboxone, or other prescriptions to help manage or replace illicit opioid use.
- Pharmaceutical alternatives: “safe supply” or physician-ordered medications to divert illicit use to controlled substances.
- OVERDOSE CRISIS: The declared public health emergency of accidental death due to potent opioids in drug supply

MAP 1. ILLICIT DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS BY RESIDENCE PER 100,000 POPULATION,  
2016-2017



Between 2017-2019 Powell River consistently had the **second highest** illicit drug overdose death rate per population among local health areas in Vancouver Coastal Health



Presently, Powell River has bounced between 2<sup>nd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> highest illicit drug overdose death rate per population in BRITISH COLUMBIA (source: BC Coroner)

Mayor Dave Formosa and Moms Stop The Harm PR co-founder Darlana Treloar in chambers in 2021

# Powell River- a Community of 10,000 People. 20K Regionally in 2016

## WHO is affected

- Men in their late 40s and older
- Men who have a history in the Trades
- Indigenous women youth to middle age
- ANYONE AT ANYTIME

## WHY according to community

- We suspect this vulnerability may be a response to chronic pain and/or
- STIGMA in seeking help is particularly potent in a rural setting
- Fentanyl can be in any drug in any amount





# 2016: the Overdose Crisis has begun to impact Powell River

You taught my daughter how to ride a bike, and for this I will never forget you and neither will she.

People call his mother bad for raising a drug addict- he used drugs only a few times and died.

- SUSTAIN peer



Mom's Stop the Harm photo of Powell River families who have lost loved ones to substance use. January 2020

# 2017: Community Fentanyl Forum

"... We will do what we always do in Powell River- help each other as much as we can in whatever way possible until we get to the bottom of this."

- Rob Southcott, City Councillor and BC Ambulance Service Paramedic



Powell River's "we're all in this together approach"

# 2018:

## PR's Community Action Team is born with specific community direction:

### SAVE LIVES RIGHT NOW

Expanding community-based harm-reduction services and NALOXONE AVAILABILITY

### SAFER ALTERNATIVES

Addressing the unsafe drug supply through expanded drug-checking services and increasing connections to addiction-treatment medications

### EARLY INTERVENTION

Proactively supporting people at risk of overdose by intervening early to provide services like treatment and housing



# 2019:

Powell River OPS opened. In the first 3 months there were

- **569** visits to use drugs on site
- **251** visits to pick up supplies
- **47** unique clients registered
- **42** kits of Naloxone distributed
- **36** drug checking tests done
- **15** people employed
- **3** referrals to Healthcare
- **3** overdoses reversed
- **0** overdose deaths on site
- **0** calls to 911



**2020:**

# The year of dual public health emergencies



- OPS Stays open!
- CAT is on the ground helping Tla'amin
- Community phones program
- Supportive Housing and unsheltered people are provided support through the OPS peers
- Strengthening Communities bolsters efforts to keep people safer

# Safe Sweep project

**City and CAT collaboration:** \$25K for Peer Empowerment and Employment Program, encouraging marginalized folks to work in community.

1. Application was a joint effort between Social Planning and the PRCAT
2. Peers work in teams to pick up refuse, discarded paraphernalia, respond to needle pickup calls, distribute naloxone, teach others about safe disposal.
3. Intended outcome is to minimize garbage and other social impacts of street-level substance use issues in neighbourhoods.

This was piloted in 2020 during lockdown to HUGE success, and has continued within the emergency shelter context:





# 2021:

## Expanding Community Medication Access

Canada's First and only RURAL injectable Opioid Agonist Therapy Clinic opens in Powell River, alongside the Overdose Prevention HUB- a dream of the CAT since inception.



2022:

# Community Impact and beyond

Dedicated community clinic for people who use drugs, even recreationally

New drug checking machine was paid for by a grant from the Public Health Services Association

Continue to refine and create programming based on actual and not theoretical needs of community

Lead the way provincially in rural care- the CAT is dedicated to sharing all we have done with others and help other regions strategize



# Knowledge Exchange



[PRCAT.CA](http://PRCAT.CA)

[powellriver.ca](http://powellriver.ca)