Compassionate Municipal Actions Amidst Community Crisis



Walk With Me: Compassionate Municipal Actions Amid Community Crisis



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BC cities are grappling with overlapping health and social crises

Toxic drug poisoning crisis: ~17,000 deaths since public health emergency was declared in 2016 (BC Coroner's Service, 2025).

Housing crisis: Housing increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible for many, rise in homelessness and encampments (Whitzman, 2024).

Smaller cities are not immune to these crises! (Bardwell & Lappalainen, 2021; Dej et.al, 2025)

Crises have been incredibly divisive.
Rather than being brought together to find solutions, communities are being pitted against each other.





How cities address these crises, matters

- Municipalities are limited in the actions they can take in relation to crisis.
- Some cities have chosen pathways that have negative consequences on those most affected.
- There is not enough connection between those making policy, and those most impacted



There is a strong need for holistic, co-created solutions to community crises

- In addressing the crises facing our communities, we need more than just citizen consultation, or even collaboration between key actors.
- We need intentional processes of co-creation that break down siloes through collective visioning.
- This is what our project, Walk With Me does.

About Walk With Me



WALK WITH MIE

uncovering the human dimensions of the over tose Visis 30 September 10 November 2020 (Wednesdays + Saturdays

CVAGICVAC





COMOX VALLEY RECORD

Comox Valley Art Gallery exercise tackles toxic drug crisis

Scott Stanfield Dec 1, 2021 5:00 PM



Some of the Nov. 28 Walk With Me participants, from left: Courtenay Mayor Bob Wells, Comox Coun. Ken Grant, Comox Mayor Russ Arnott, Cumberland Mayor Leslie Baird, Cumberland Coun. Jesse Ketler and Walk With Me team member Sam Franey. Scott Stanfield photo

A number of Comox Valley politicians took part in a exercise that illustrates the devastating effects of the toxic drug poisoning crisis, Sunday, Nov. 28 at the Comox Valley Art Gallery. Dubbed Walk With Me, the politicians and other participants listened to stories from individuals

TOFINO-UCLUELET WESTERLY NEWS

Minister of mental health and addictions among participants at Walk With Me event



Terry Farrell Nov 26, 2022 3:30 PM



1/3 Mental Health and Addictions Minister Sheila Malcolmson was among the nearly three dozen participants at Saturday's (Nov. 26) Walk With Me event in Courtenay. Photo by Terry Farrell

Mental Health and Addictions Minister Sheila Malcolmson, as well as Comox Valley-Strathcona-North Island Medical Health Officer Dr. Charmaine Enns, were among the 30 participants at Saturday's (Nov. 26) Walk With Me event in Courtenay.

The Walk With Me project involves a 45-minute group walk while listening to audio stories

COWICHAN VALLEY CITIZEN

Duncan Walk with Me gives voice to vulnerable populations

Chadd Cawson

Jun 20, 2024 5:45 AM



3 / 6 The "Walk with Me' event that was held in Duncan on June 11, gave community members who took part, the opportunity to walk the streets where many of our most vulnerable population resides while listening to first-hand stories of those with lived experience, leaving all in attendance a lot to reflect on. | Chadd Cawson/Citizen

Listen to this article 00:06:53

Sometimes the best, and only way to walk in another person's shoes is to just listen to their story — we all have one.

The Walk with Me community action project was first formed in 2019 in response to the toxic

How a Comox Valley Project Is Confronting the Toxic Drug Crisis

By centering community expertise, 'Walk with Me' is offering solutions from the ground up.



Dustin Godfrey / 10 May 2023 TheTyee.ca

Dustin Godfrey is a freelance journalist based in New Westminster. They are interested in justice and its many intersections.



Christopher Hauschildt, left, leads a group through False Creek as part of the Walk with Me project, an initiative based in the Comox Valley that aims to share the realities of the toxic drug crisis through the voices of those with lived experience. Photo by Dustin Godfrey for The Tyee.











Holding space for lived experiences and safer ways of being amidst the Toxic Drug Poisoning Crisis.

ART OPENING + ARTIST TALKS: Saturday, October 5, 2024 | 1:00pm - 3:00pm

FACILITATED COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: Thursdays, October 10 + 17, 2024 | 1:00pm - 3:00pm

EXHIBITION + COMMUNITY DROP-IN STATIONS: Wednesdays - Saturdays, October 9 - 19, 2024 | 10:00am - 5:00pm

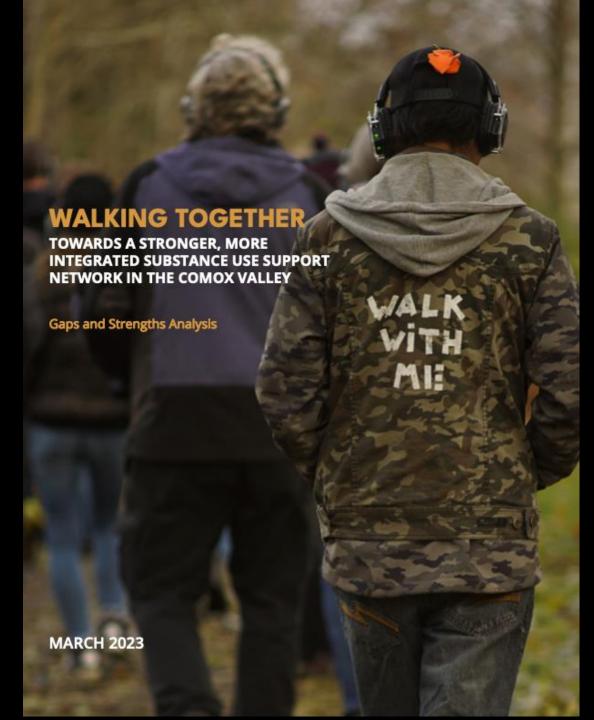


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COMMUNITY SUBSTANCE USE STRATEGY

PHASE TWO REPORT

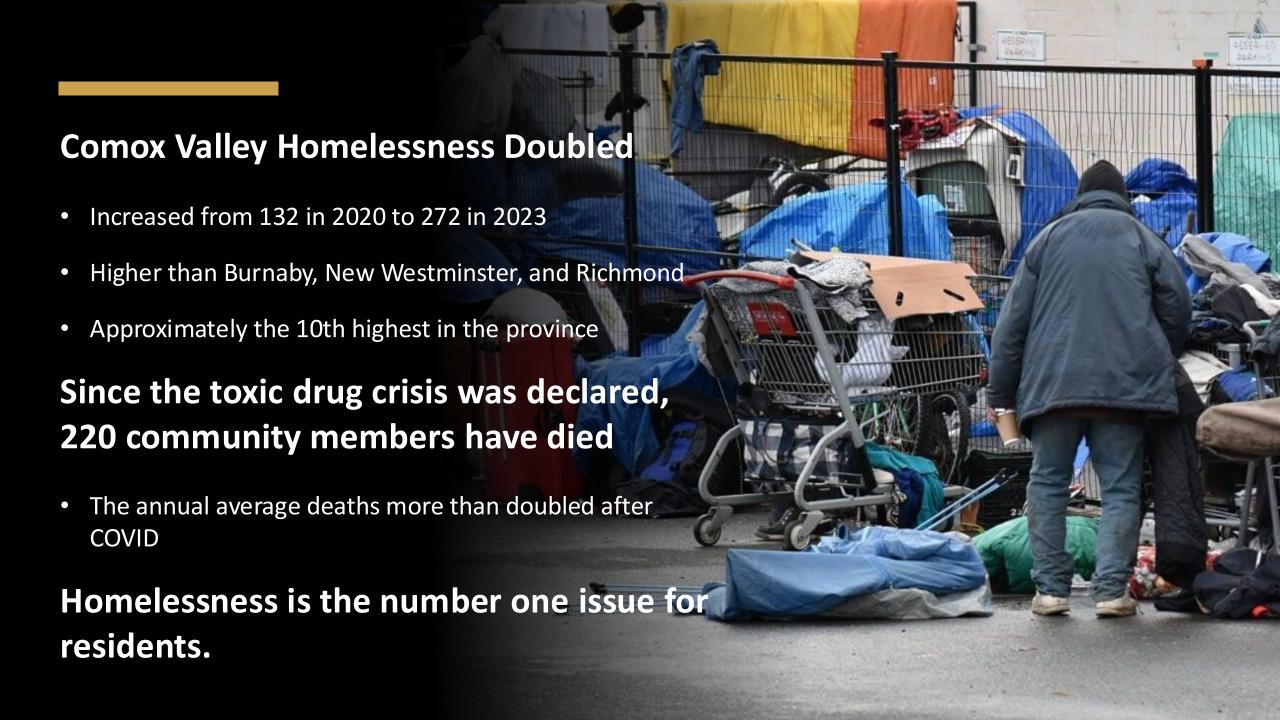




Community Amid Crisis

Presented by: Susie Saunders, Director of Recreation, Culture and Community Services September 23, 2025, UBCM





Community Responses





City Staff Engagement

To address staff safety concerns and reduce stigma, we collaborated with **Walk with Me**:

- Hosted walks for employees
- Tailored circle dialogues to gather insights from staff
- Created safe spaces for difficult discussions with the goal of reducing division



City Circles

Barriers & Gaps

- Improve policy and procedures
- Increase staff capacity
- Better equip staff with tools and training
- Address public stigma

Supports

- Establish outreach positions
- Cultivate harm reduction partnerships
- Foster learning opportunities
- Strengthen staff mental health support

Next Steps

Walk with Me

- Host Story Walks and Circles for staff
- Confirm and adjust key insights
- Bring staff together to co-create next steps

Community Engagement

- Incorporating circle dialogues in shelter planning
- Applying concepts to shelters with a community integration lens
- Culture Connects Us: Strategic
 Cultural Plan emphasizes the role
 arts and culture plays in belonging
 & inclusion, addressing complex
 social issues and supporting
 community healing.



What do compassionate conversations look like in your community?

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