

FIRST FOCUS

VANCOUVER AGREEMENT

NEWS RELEASE

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Vancouver Agreement initiatives signal new approach to Downtown Eastside

VANCOUVER - Vancouver Agreement partners announced today the first phase of a comprehensive program to address the urgent and complex social, economic, health and safety issues of the Downtown Eastside.

Representing the three governments participating in the Vancouver Agreement, Dr. Hedy Fry, secretary of state, multiculturalism and status of women, Jenny Kwan, minister of community development, cooperatives and volunteers, and Mayor Philip Owen, unveiled an integrated plan that ties together expanded treatment services, law enforcement, and street improvements, with housing and community and economic development programs.

The key components of this phase are:

- Establishment of a Downtown Eastside treatment centre with new and expanded treatment services to close gaps in care systems and improve their effectiveness. The centre will provide a range of detox, sobering services, stabilization services, outreach, and methadone therapy.
- Expansion of treatment services throughout the City.
- Creation of an indoor health connection program to provide frontline health and substance misuse referral services, life skills training and social support programs for street involved drug and alcohol users. (Total cost of the above three initiatives \$2.1 million.)
- Redeployment of police officers to increase contact and visibility in the community. (\$1.6 million of reallocated funding.)
- Improved police coordination with health services and other agencies to link drug and alcohol users to available programs.
- Stepped up enforcement efforts targeting drug dealers.
- A physical redesign of the Carnegie Centre entrance to reduce illegal drug activity at the corner of Main and Hastings Streets. (\$200,000)
- Expansion of street improvement programs including expanded graffiti removal and needle and drug paraphernalia pick-up. (\$180,000)

- New housing developments located in various neighbourhoods. (\$7.5 million)
- The establishment of the Partners in Economic and Community Help fund to provide loans, loan guarantees, grants and lease subsidies to organizations and businesses in the DTES area. (\$2.3 million)

These nine initiatives will involve a total investment of \$13.9 million in the community.

The Vancouver Agreement is a five-year collaboration involving the federal, provincial and municipal governments. Signed in March, the Agreement focuses on three main areas: community health and safety; economic and social development; and community capacity building. Although the Agreement refers to the whole city, the first focus of the work is the Downtown Eastside.

“Based on the experiences of other jurisdictions that have tackled the same problems as Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, we recognize these challenges will not be solved with any single solution. It is only by taking a comprehensive and integrated approach to health, safety, housing and economic development that we can address the underlying problems in this neighbourhood. This is why we are focusing on the four pillar approach,” said Dr. Fry.

“The community development funds I announced recently, plus new housing initiatives and the integrated health and treatment services unveiled today provide a framework of support for the entire community,” Kwan said. “These initiatives provide tools for improving the health of individuals and the community.”

Mayor Owen stressed that these first initiatives were the beginning of a comprehensive four pillar approach which includes prevention/rehabilitation, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement. “This strategy will benefit not only those who live and work in the Downtown Eastside, but the entire city. These first steps will help to reduce property crime, improve safety and order and the appearance of the neighbourhood, revitalize the local economy and encourage employment opportunities.”

All three levels of government are contributing to the initiatives either through direct funding, provision of land or buildings, or through loan guarantees.

The Vancouver Agreement partners also noted the important contribution made by the community. “Over the years, many individuals have donated countless hours of personal time providing their ideas on how the issues in this neighbourhood could be addressed. Many of their ideas are reflected in this plan,” added Owen. “And we will continue to consult with the community on the implementation of these important initiatives.”

By strategically linking a number of new approaches and programs, the Vancouver Agreement creates a comprehensive, four pillar approach that integrates re-design of public space and new enforcement initiatives with expanded and strategically integrated health services, housing and community and economic development.

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