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October 27, 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: SOLID Outreach Temporary Use Permit Application

I am writing today in support of the Cannabis Substitution Program (CSP) being delivered at 1056 North Park Street, Victoria BC.

On April 14, 2016 Dr. Perry Kendall, Provincial Health Officer, under the *Public Health Act of British Columbia*, declared a Public Health Emergency because of the unparalleled number of deaths from opioid ingestion. Since that declaration, thousands of individuals have died in British Columbia from opioid overdose. This crisis has spawned a variety of responses such as making previously restricted naloxone readily available to the public and the creation of overdose prevention sites that were previously not allowed by law. Through community-based efforts by healthcare providers, people with lived experience, and elected officials, the number of fatal and non-fatal opioid overdoses had been blunted, only to surge to record levels with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic as documented by the BC Coroners Service. Leveling this new and disheartening upward trend is not enough. Further progress to reduce the rate of overdoses can be realized through enhancements in care and treatment, drug testing and other novel facility-based interventions. Nevertheless, even with these efforts, the number of overdoses and overdose deaths remain unacceptably high.

Our province supports the provision of pharmaceutical grade opioids under medical supervision as a form of harm reduction by ensuring both safety of supply and the opportunity to link people to care where they are receiving that safe supply. This accepted approach to harm reduction has been adopted locally by SOLID, an organization of people with lived experience of substance use. SOLID provides harm reduction supplies, naloxone training, peer support, and other services. It also has been seeking out less dangerous means of addressing opioid dependency including withdrawal symptoms. They have gained experiential knowledge on using cannabis, a now legal product in Canada, as an alternative to opioid substitution that successfully addresses withdrawal, pain management, and at times replaces the ingestion of opioids. The CSP at 1056 North Park Street only engages established opioid users and provides an opportunity to connect these individuals with supportive services including support groups, harm reduction supplies, supervised consumption services and linkage to care, if desired. The potential benefits of this harm reduction initiative has attracted the attention of University of Victoria researchers and the interest of Island Health. It is notable that promising evidence is emerging from research studies on the potential efficacy of so-called cannabis substitution programs in providing equitable access to cannabis and reducing the risk of illicit drug overdoses among those at highest risk.

Indeed, emerging evidence suggests that cannabis has a potential role as part of a broader strategy to support people who use other substances.

As the physician tasked with serving our region as the Chief Medical Health Officer and Vice President of Population Health at Island Health, I continue to be supportive of the CSP and evaluating this service ongoing with SOLID as one way to address the contaminated and deadly drug supply on our streets.



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