

Inner-City COVID-19 Response Strategy

Working together to keep vulnerable people safe during dual public health emergencies

Significant action is required to mitigate the dual impacts of both the opioid overdose and COVID-19 public health emergencies for people living in Vancouver's inner-city communities.

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), together with Providence Health Care (PHC), and in close partnership with provincial, municipal and community partners, has implemented the **Inner-City COVID-19 Response**. This approach (**Prevent, Test and Trace, and Support**) ensures a coordinated, comprehensive response to COVID-19 in Vancouver's inner city, including the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

It is reinforced by the ongoing work to maintain and sustain a strong continuum of services, work with municipal partners to address the social determinants of health, and ensure cultural safety and ongoing support to Indigenous peoples and organizations.

Our Inner-City COVID-19 Response has required robust partnerships and extensive coordination between Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), Providence Health Care (PHC), the City of Vancouver, BC Housing, the provincial government and our many community partners. We continue building on this collaboration to ensure a comprehensive response that evolves to meet the changing needs of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every action in our Inner-City COVID-19 Response includes a lens of Indigenous cultural safety. VCH recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic brings up historical trauma for Indigenous people, as they were harmed significantly by pandemics in the past. We keep this in the forefront of our minds when supporting and protecting Indigenous people in our Inner-City COVID-19 Response.

While the most intensive focus of this response has been on supporting Vancouver's inner city, this framework can be adapted and scaled-up regionally to support vulnerable populations across VCH.



RESPONSE OVERVIEW

PREVENT

Helping to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 amongst vulnerable people in the DTES and care providers working in the community.

- › Capacity building and clinical education
- › Guidelines for safe care
- › Supporting new shelter capacity to reduce shelter crowding, including Emergency Response Centres (ERCs)
- › Personal protective equipment (PPE) coordination and training



TEST AND TRACE

Ensuring access to testing for vulnerable people and care providers in the DTES, as well as public health follow-up for any suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19.

- › Testing and follow-up for vulnerable people in DTES, and frontline community service providers
- › Provide rapid connection to supportive resources for individuals diagnosed with, or exposed to COVID-19.



SUPPORT

Ensuring vulnerable people have access to the care they need to be safe in the community, including access to overdose prevention services, temporary housing, and clinical care needed to safely self-isolate for those who have been exposed to, or diagnosed with, COVID-19.

- › New clinical and case management resources to support people with COVID-19: COVID-19 Assessment Team, COVID Outreach Team
- › Ensuring availability of overdose prevention and supervised consumption services and harm reduction supplies
- › Supporting the rapid implementation of new prescribing guidelines to support people who use drugs (PWUD)
- › Supporting new temporary housing supports at hotel facilities for people with COVID-19
- › Teams to support housing needs during COVID-19: Temporary Housing Referral Team and Rapid Response Team



SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES

- › Maintain and sustain strong continuum of services
- › Working with partners to address social determinants of health
- › Cultural safety and support for Indigenous people and organizations

THREE PILLARS



PREVENT

Helping to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 amongst vulnerable people in Vancouver's inner city, and amongst care providers working in the community.

- › **Ensure safe care for clients and care providers** through **guideline development, training** and **capacity building** to support care, housing providers and clients during the COVID-19 response.
 - VCH has rapidly collated resources for community organizations who work with vulnerable populations. Clinical educators are providing frequent education sessions for community staff.
 - Regular meetings between VCH/PHC and inner-city community partners to ensure their needs are appropriately supported.
- › VCH has worked closely with BC Housing and the City of Vancouver to implement temporary **emergency response centres (ERCs)** at two community centres—Coal Harbour and the Roundhouse—with capacity to help temporarily house over 130 people. This extra capacity will work to help prevent COVID-19 transmission in crowded shelters through supporting people who are experiencing homelessness or living in shelters, to be able to physically distance.
- › Appropriate use of **personal protective equipment (PPE)** is important to support frontline health care workers to work safely and efficiently and to prevent transmission COVID-19. VCH continues to centrally coordinate PPE for our managed and contracted services, and VCH Nurse Educators are working with all community partners to ensure they have the PPE training they need.



TEST AND TRACE

Ensuring access to testing for vulnerable people and care providers in Vancouver's inner city, as well as public health follow-up for any suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases.

- › VCH and PHC have implemented **COVID-19 testing** for clients and frontline service providers who work with this community.
 - This includes mobile, on-site and drive-through testing teams.
- › VCH Public Health is providing **follow-up for suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases and potential exposures**.
 - Any lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19, and potentially exposed contacts, are followed-up with a public health team to monitor symptoms daily.
 - Additional support services, including environmental cleaning and infection control measures, are mobilized as part of public health follow-up (as needed) to support each client.



SUPPORT

Ensuring vulnerable people have access to the care they need to be safe in the community, including access to overdose prevention services, temporary housing, and clinical care needed to safely self-isolate for those who have been exposed to, or diagnosed with, COVID-19.

- › **Clinical supports:** In addition to existing medical supports provided by VCH and community partners, we have strengthened resources to help care for people during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - **The COVID Assessment Team:** central coordination hub to mobilize supports and resources to support homeless and/or precariously housed people to self-isolate. This includes:
 - › Care coordination and case management
 - › Access to housing (via the Temporary Housing Referral Team)
 - › Clinical supports (via the COVID Outreach Team)
 - › Coordination with the Rapid Response Team for infection prevention and control support
 - **The COVID Outreach Team:** outreach nursing care for people who have COVID-19, including:
 - › Access to urgent and primary care
 - › Access to medications—including opioid agonist therapy (OAT)—to prevent withdrawal
 - › Supporting complex client care coordination/transition
 - › Access to infection prevention and control consultation

- › VCH has **new prescriber guidelines in place** to support people who use drugs (PWUD) who may experience withdrawal symptoms while in self-isolation due to COVID-19.

- Together with local prescribers and pharmacists, the BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) and our provincial government partners, we're supporting rapid implementation of these new guidelines in our region to make it easier for people who use drugs (PWUD) to access prescribed medications including OAT medications.
- This includes seven day a week support from the VCH Overdose Outreach Team (OOT) for people who don't have a family doctor to link them to a prescriber, in addition to providing prescribers and pharmacists consultation support.

Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) and Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS) are essential services to address the ongoing overdose public health emergency.

- We have been working with OPS operators to ensure that they have the supplies, workers and training to continue running these sites safely.
 - This includes ensuring staff and client safety by providing nursing supports to train staff on safely reversing overdoses while clinical protocols for COVID-19 are followed.
 - VCH continues to centrally coordinate **harm reduction supplies** for our managed and contracted services.
- › **Temporary housing** (partnership with BC Housing) is being opened at hotels, based in downtown Vancouver, to provide people who are homeless or precariously housed space to self-isolate safely. VCH and PHC are leading the provision of clinical and support services onsite to support people in these facilities.
 - The **Temporary Housing Referral Team** works with the COVID Assessment Team to coordinate referrals into and out of Emergency Response Centres (ERCs), hotels and other housing during COVID-19.
 - The **Rapid Response Team** provides urgent infection prevention and control response and training to housing and shelter facilities to ensure client, staff and site safety.

SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES

Maintain and sustain a strong continuum of services

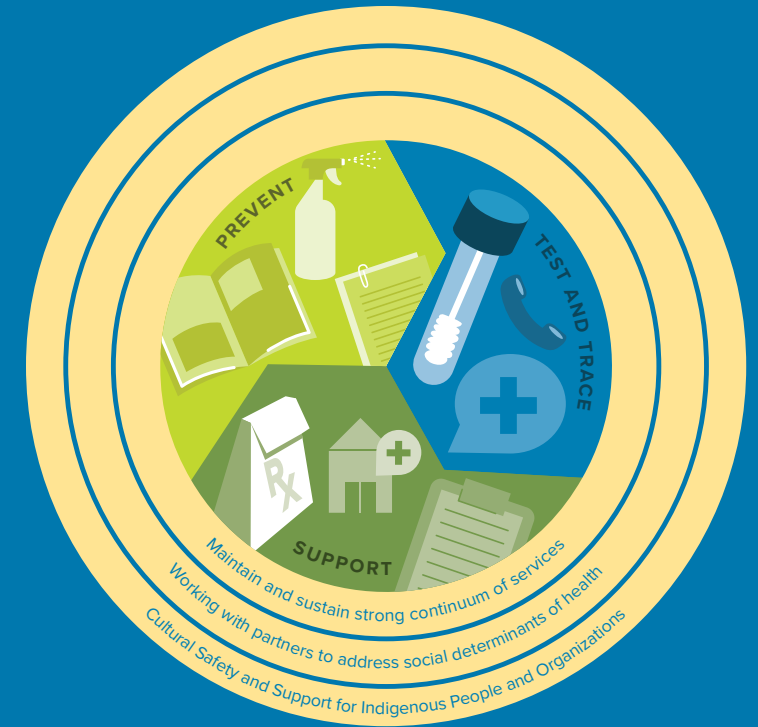
VCH works to ensure strong access and attachment to existing primary care, mental health and substance use, and home health supports, including strengthening capacity for outreach visits and remote/virtual client contacts. This also includes increasing capacity at existing services (e.g. Vancouver Detox Centre) to ensure needs of clients are met during COVID-19.

Working with partners to address social determinants of health

VCH continues to support municipal and community partners to address social determinants of health during COVID-19. Examples of this includes working with local municipalities to implement strategies to maintain food security in communities, access to healthy public spaces (e.g. public washroom facilities), and ongoing public health guidance for housing for homeless and precariously housed people.

Cultural safety and support for Indigenous people and organizations

Every action in our COVID-19 Response Strategy includes a lens of Indigenous cultural safety. VCH Aboriginal Health, in partnership with First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), is working to closely support all actions identified in this strategy. Additionally, VCH is in direct communication with Indigenous-specific housing agencies to promote mobile testing for symptomatic residents and share COVID-19 related resources and information. VCH is partnering with the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) Urban Indigenous Communications Network and ensuring the needs and priorities of urban Indigenous people are included in VCH's Inner-City COVID-19 Response.



RESOURCES

VCH has developed a compilation of resources to support people who are providing services for vulnerable people in Vancouver's inner city. This resource will be updated over time.

- › **DTES and community partner resources:**
sneezesdiseases.com/covid-19-community-resources

For information about COVID-19:

- › **VCH COVID-19 Website:** www.vch.ca/COVID-19
- › **FNHA Information on COVID-19**
fnha.ca/what-we-do/communicable-disease-control/coronavirus

For more information and access to COVID-19 support, please contact the COVID-19 Assessment Team: 604.290.3208