



CIFAL Victoria - Students' Assembly on Reducing Harms from Toxic Drugs



 : 16 20 2025

	:	Course
	:	Victoria, Canada
	:	27 30 2025 to 30 30 2025
	:	3 Days
	:	Decentralize Cooperation Programme
	:	https://www.uvic.ca/campus/overdose-prevention/students-assembly/index.php
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	:	CIFAL Victoria, , University of Victoria



The University of Victoria is developing an Overdose Prevention and Response Plan, and we wish to strengthen it using student input and the value of their lived experiences. The involvement of students in this plan is a crucial step in building a campus-wide strategy that is both effective and responsive to the needs of

students. As primary stakeholders in any campus policy on substance use and harm reduction, students bring invaluable insights that cannot be fully captured through academic research or expert opinions alone. While students will not be asked to create an entirely new strategy, they will have the opportunity to provide recommendations to UVic's Overdose Response and Prevention Committee to use to inform UVic's approach to harm reduction and prevention.



The primary objectives of this event are centered around harm reduction and health promotion on campus. They are (in no particular order) as follows:

1. To gather student insights and feedback to inform university actions and initiatives surrounding health promotion and harm reduction. Specifically, to inform a report from the Special Advisor on Overdose Response and Prevention to the Vice-President Academic and Provost. This report will guide the University's efforts toward becoming a leader in health promotion, and the insights gathered from the students' assembly will help to inform the university's creation of a harm reduction framework that is inclusive, evidence-based, and deeply aligned with the needs of students.
2. To inform and educate participants on the complexities of these topics, encouraging students to think critically about harm reduction, substance use, and health promotion.
3. To promote safe, open, and productive discussions between participants (and facilitators) about the relevant topics. We want participants to leave each discussion having learnt something and contributed their own knowledge and/or experience in some way to the larger group.
4. To build trust and reciprocity with students. Involving students in this participatory process will foster greater transparency and trust. This meaningful engagement with topics that are of great concern to the UVic community will help restore confidence in the university by demonstrating a genuine commitment to listening to students, learning from their experiences, and actively working to create a safer, healthier campus.
5. To collect research data. A research study can be undertaken following the conclusion of the student assembly to distill students' learning and personal growth, both in terms of the process (student deliberation) and substance (overdose prevention and substance use). This would generate important insights about the design, dynamics, and outcomes of student assembly's and help UVic establish its leadership in this area.



1. Understand the Toxic Drug Crisis

- Understand the causes, scope, evolution and nature of the toxic drug crisis, with a particular focus on the unregulated drug supply (including fentanyl) and the potentially lethal effects
- Be familiar with national and local statistics and trends that highlight the severity and scope of the crisis, including rising drug use among specific groups (e.g., young adults) and the increasing availability of toxic drugs.
- Define key terms related to the toxic drug crisis, including toxic drugs, and toxic drug supply.
- Recognize the complexity of the issue and the multiple factors contributing to the crisis
- Become familiar with some of the different ways of framing the problem (e.g. medical/pharmaceutical; public health/social determinants of health; mental health/addictions: criminal justice/legal; structural inequality/social determinants of health)
- Appreciate how different conceptualizations of the problem generate different solutions (e.g harm reduction, de-criminalization, regulation, educational programs, clinical services, drug policies, advocacy, criminal justice, policing, peer support, community-and user-led approaches) with each solution having different effects on individuals, families, communities
- Be aware of (at least some of) the background to prohibitionist policies. UVic campus community members may not be able to change federal law, but they can be helped to recognize the validity of taking up that issue, even if it is a longer-term more widely collaborative strategy than the more immediate things that should and can be done in our own setting.

2. Recognize a Range of Motivations for Drug Use

- Understand that the use of psychoactive substances (mind-altering drugs) has been part of the human experience across the globe for thousands of years.
- Recognize that humans have derived benefits from these substances, which include helping people to feel good, feel better under difficult circumstances,

perform better than they might otherwise, and/or explore and enjoy new dimensions of experience.

- Understand the different classes of toxic drugs, illicit drugs and their potential impacts (i.e. what is a depressive, hallucinogenic, stimulant); what are their internal / external effects and why people use them.
- Understand that there are a range of motivations for using drugs, and - in the context of the current toxic drug crisis - that there are increased risks for harm, sometimes severe.

3. Identify Harm Reduction Strategies

- Understand the range of potential physical, mental, and social (e.g., stigma, academic performance) harms that can arise as a result of drug use and exposure to the toxic drug supply.
- Identify real-world harm reduction strategies implemented in various communities.
- Understand the importance of adopting a de-stigmatizing, non-punitive approach to reduce barriers to help-seeking.
- Understand harm reduction strategies currently being implemented at universities (including UVic).
- Understand the role of research and data in shaping harm reduction strategies, and how these inform the policy development process.

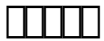
4. Evaluate the Success of Interventions

- Identify key factors that contribute to the success or failure of interventions, both broadly and within university contexts.
- Critically analyze evidence-based strategies and how they can be adapted to the unique needs of university communities.
- Examine trade-offs and competing demands that influence the development of effective solutions to the toxic drug crisis.

5. Understand the University's Role

- Understand the university's responsibility in addressing the toxic drug crisis and its role in supporting student well-being through harm prevention and response strategies.
- Review the university's current initiatives regarding harm prevention and response.

- Know the key entities within the university who are involved in responding to the toxic drug crisis and understand their roles.



1. **Participant Selection through a Civic Lottery:** To maintain the integrity of this process, UVic students will be invited to participate through random selection. Emails will be sent to students through the Office of the Registrar, and criteria will be applied to ensure the selected group of 30-40 students reflects the diversity of the student population (i.e. undergraduate, graduate, international, living on-campus, living off-campus, etc.).
2. **Seminar-style sessions:** Guest speaker presentations from subject matter experts and stakeholders, Q&A sessions, small break-out group discussions, and full-group discussions (following break-out group sessions).
3. **Deliberative Process:** Each session will explore different aspects of the central question: “What does a health-promoting campus look like to you?” These structured conversations will allow students to reflect on various dimensions of campus life, providing a holistic view of how a health-promoting environment can be fostered.
4. **Facilitating Discussions:** A facilitator with a background in harm reduction, substance use, and health promotion will provide short lectures and ongoing support to guide students through the process. They will set goals and expectations for each session, and direct discussions to promote respectful debate and critical thinking and encourage participation and engagement.
5. **Outcome:** The insights and recommendations gathered throughout these dialogues will culminate in a final report, which could help inform actionable steps that the university can take to create a healthier, more supportive campus community. .



The methodology for learning in this student assembly is knowledge-acquisition focused. Students should finish this assembly feeling as though they have not only educated themselves further on harm reduction, substance use, and health promotion, but that they have personally contributed something meaningful to the UVic community. Student learning is designed to be comprehensive and interactive using a multi-faceted approach. First, for each even participants will

receive a short outline of what will be covered and important information to review in advance of the session. Then, at the beginning of each session after the facilitator introduces the days' themes and purpose, participants will watch a presentation by an expert or stakeholder in the related topics and take notes on points they wish to discuss or highlight. Then, participants will break-out into small groups and discuss the lecture as well as the directive questions introduced by the facilitator, they will work together to compile a list of important takeaways, considerations, and suggestions relevant to the UVic Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Plan. Finally, at the last session, student participants will compile a completed document/presentation containing their suggestions, concerns, and proposed solutions. They will present this to a panel of UVic administrators and staff who are working on (or stakeholders in) the Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention plan.



UVic Students. The aim is to reach and involve a representational sample of the student body in this process.