

COMMUNITY



Treatment, recovery and harm reduction

For too long, a conflict has been waged within the field of substance use and addiction support. On one side, harm reduction advocates championing safer supply, clean gear, naloxone distribution and training, stigma busting, community education and non-judgmental care. On the other, politicians and treatment and recovery communities calling for abstinence pathways, criminalization, rehabilitation, involuntary care, and long-term sobriety support. This divide is apparent in the two provincial approaches often exemplified by Alberta and British Columbia.

This framing has set these approaches as somewhat oppositional to one another, positioning them as incompatible philosophies fighting for legitimacy, effectiveness, funding and the identity of communities. This framing is wrong. It is costing lives. It is creating greater polarization. And it obscures the true intent of harm reduction.

Harm reduction at its core is about meeting people where they are. It rejects the punitive and moralistic approaches that have failed in the war on drugs. It prioritizes keeping people alive, reducing suffering and respecting autonomy over

demanding behavioural compliance.

But here is what often gets lost in the debate; detox, treatment and recovery are also forms of meeting people where they are. When someone wants to stop fully, or someone is ready to explore some version of sobriety, when they want to support building a life that no longer centres on substance use, the response cannot be an ideological hesitation. The response must be: yes, and here is the plan for how we support you in that.

Recovery pathways, including detox, residential treatment, peer support networks, medication-assisted recovery, and long-term counselling should not be concessions to the abstinence focused crowd. They are tools. Like naloxone is a tool. Like a supervised consumption site is a tool. The question should not be: which tools do you like or support. The question should always be: which tools does this person want and need right now? Working for treatment and recovery is one of the core pillars of Community Action Teams and a core pillar of holistic substance use support systems.

Those with lived experience will con-

firm that people move fluidly through stages of readiness. Someone in active addiction may simply want a counsellor to talk to in order to explore present or future options. Someone using a safer supply program today may want withdrawal management support next month. Someone who has been in recovery for three years may need harm reduction resources again after a relapse.

What we urgently need is a genuinely holistic infrastructure, one where we can offer a fentanyl test strip and also help someone secure a spot on a waitlist for residential treatment. Where peer support workers with lived experience of both active use and recovery are valued equally and their knowledge and skills can be mobilized in community. A system where funding does not artificially force organizations to choose an ideology over an appropriate and realistic continuum of care.

The communities hit hardest by the overdose crisis deserve all the tools available. People deserve the dignity of being kept alive in their most vulnerable moments and the choice of being supported toward whatever a healing and recovery journey looks like for them. We

can want both; we can have both, but it is certainly harder with this binary approach that pits policy against policy and personal feelings over evidence.

Harm reduction should not end at staying alive. Survival ought to be the beginning. What comes after is treatment, recovery, reconnection, and rebuilding and ongoing support. These things are not the opposite of harm reduction principles and efforts. The complete system is the fullest expression.

Chris Hergesheimer is the project lead for the Sunshine Coast Community Action Team (SCCAT). Each month, the Sunshine Coast Community Action Team (SCCAT) will contribute an article to the coast reporter. The goal of these articles is to share trends, highlight stories, thoughts, ideas, share stories and explore the complexity around substance use. We aim to start conversations, challenge ourselves and others to think differently with the overall goal to combat stigma, build bridges in our community and save lives. Learn more about the work of 38 unique Community Action Teams across the province here <https://caibc.ca/grants/community-action-teams/> and our regional work at www.sccat.ca



Pacific Ocean Discovery Station enters next phase of construction

LOON FOUNDATION
Submitted

Community celebration signals progress toward a world-class centre for ocean/climate research, Indigenous knowledge, education, and culture on the Sunshine Coast

The Loon Foundation, in collaboration with shíshálh Nation and Capilano University, held a milestone event to celebrate a new phase of development of the Pacific Ocean Discovery Station (PODS).

Gathering community members, partners, supporters, and local MLA Randene Neill, the celebration marks the next phase of construction, bringing this transformative community vision one step closer to reality in kalpilin (Pender Harbour), on the swiya (world, birthplace, Territory) of the shíshálh Nation. After more than a decade of planning, partnership-building, and investment, PODS is advancing from Phase One site preparation and

project development into Phase Two major construction.

With more than \$10 million invested to make the project shovel-ready, the Loon Foundation and its partners are now focused on delivering a destination that will inspire learning, innovation, cultural connection, and environmental stewardship for generations to come.

"This has been a period of tremendous progress and heart," said Lana Brandt, executive director of the Loon Foundation. "Together with our partners, we have strengthened the project's financial foundation, secured support from federal and provincial governments, attracted private investment, and refined our business model to ensure long-term sustainability.

"Today marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter. We are profoundly grateful for the community support to date, and invite community members to remain part of the jour-



PHOTO SUBMITTED

The Irving's Landing construction site was visited by Brendan Glauser (LF board co-chair), Lana Brandt, MLA Randene Neill, Mike McDermid (LF board), Andy Koberitz (PODS construction committee).

ney."

Phase Two of the project includes the construction of the cutting-edge mass-timber facility that will serve as a hub for climate and ocean research, education, Indigenous knowledge-sharing, cultural programming, and community engagement. Significant progress has been made toward the project's capital goals, with government contributions, philanthropic support, and private donations helping to advance construction. As PODS moves toward completion, opportunities remain for individuals, families, businesses, and foundations to play a meaningful role in bringing this landmark project to life. Leadership gifts and naming opportunities are now available, offering supporters the chance to create a lasting legacy while helping establish one of British Columbia's most innovative centres for ocean discovery and environmental learning.

"What you are creating at PODS as a research centre of excellence, as a place to gather as a community, and welcome visitors in to learn about our community, this is a game changer not only for the Sunshine Coast, but for the entire province," said MLA for Powell River – Sunshine Coast Randene Neill, who also serves as provincial Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.

The PODS project would not be possible without the support of our community. The Loon Foundation will continue to share updates as this construction phase progresses.

The Loon Foundation works with Sunshine Coast communities to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems through science, education, and collaborative stewardship. The Foundation's work is rooted in partnership, place-based knowledge, and a commitment to long-term ecosystem health.