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WINTER 2024, Vol. 48, No. 4 1736 E. 33rd Ave. Van., B.C. V5N 3E2 604 327-1665

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# Toxic Brain Injury – opioid addiction creating dire health crisis

As tragic as those who continue to die daily from drug overdoses in Vancouver is, the unchecked opioid overdose emergency is creating an even more dire health crisis, Toxic Brain Injury – brain damage that has occurred from prolonged substance misuse and nonfatal overdose.

Opioid misuse can cause hypoxia, a condition that results when too little oxygen reaches the brain. Hypoxia can occur within four minutes of oxygen deprivation and has short- and long-term psychological and neurological effects, including permanent brain damage, or death.

A recent report using data from the United States estimated that the ratio between fatal to non-fatal overdose cases is one to 15, whereas older Australian data suggest ranges from one to 20–30.

According to the BC Coroners Service website, there have been 4,073 overdose deaths in the city between 2014 and Oct. 17, 2024.

Even using the more conservative one to 15 ratio and applying it to Vancouver's fatality rate we can assume there are 61,095 individuals with varying degrees of brain damage who've been introduced to the population in the last eight years (*see editorial update at the end of the article.*)

The symptoms of brain damage include:

- Memory or concentration problems.
- Mood changes or mood swings.
- Feeling depressed or anxious.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Profound confusion.
- Agitation, combativeness or other unusual behaviour.

It's not surprising that someone with Toxic Brain Injury might find coping with day to day living a challenge and display anti-social behaviour. The cost of caring for those



*Could the prevalence of random violent attacks and recidivism be attributed at least in part to the thousands of individuals who have survived an overdose and are now brain damaged?*

with the more extreme symptoms is an additional burden on the health care system. Even more concerning is the risk to public safety if the prevalence of random violent attacks and recidivism can be attributed, at least in part, to these 61,095 individuals who have survived an overdose and are now brain damaged.

In the light of this new reality, should current strategies

be reconsidered specifically in the areas of public safety, health resources and current city policies?

The REVUE posed this question to the Vancouver Police Department, Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver City Council and academics in this field of research.

So far, Vancouver Coastal Health is the only agency that

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## THE HOT PINK PAPER CAMPAIGN (HPPC) TWO-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

### “Bold action” required if City Council to fulfill HPPC commitments

**The Summary on Vancouver City Council by Women Transforming Cities (WTC) states that City Council “will require bold action in the remainder of their term” if it is to realize it’s HPPC policy commitments.**

According to the report, ABC councillors have improved their record in only three of the eight Hot Pink Paper Policy Asks they committed to before taking office in 2022, while Green and OneCity councillors consistently voted in alignment with their HPPC commitments.

The Hot Pink Paper Campaign (HPPC) is an issue-based campaign that amplifies the priorities of equity-deserving residents in the City of Vancouver through community engagement, candidate commitments and Council accountability.

The Revue has been following the WTC campaign because the priorities for equity-deserving residents are, for the most part, the same for all Vancouver residents.

A summary of the eight policy asks are:

1. An Equity Lens on Councillor Motions
2. IWG2S+ People's Healing Lodge

3. Reducing Barriers for Affordable Housing
4. Protecting Tenants from Heatwaves
5. Alternative Models to Community Safety
6. Washrooms for All
7. Fully Fund Climate Emergency Responses
8. Affordable and Accessible Transit

Council took steps forward on washrooms, protecting tenants from heatwaves, and promoting Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit peoples (IWG2S+) healing. They also made some promising decisions related to non-policing models of community safety, “but those sat alongside trends of over-policing, criminalization of poverty, and alarming revelations about police accountability, governance, and culture.”

The harshest criticism in the report is Council's contradiction of their climate emergency commitment “through a surprise reversal of Vancouver's ban on methane in new buildings.” It points out that Councillors Lisa Dominato and Peter Meiszner split with their ABC colleagues and voted against ending the gas ban, “signalling just how far this decision strays from

Vancouver's tradition of climate leadership.”

While WTC says some progress was made on reducing barriers to non-market housing there was still insufficient attention to non-profit, social, and co-op housing with some cases, council's decisions appearing to be more “focused on easing the burden for wealthy developers and mansion owners than providing social and rental housing to those who need it.”

The summary warns that equity is not only about policy outcomes—it's also about how decisions are made, saying it has “concerns over trends in the process and tone of decision-making including a lack of transparency, attempts to silence criticisms, and disregard for the value of democratic engagement.”

Women Transforming Cities (WTC) is “a grassroots non-profit that aims to radically shift social, economic, and political power to equity-deserving groups to reshape who cities are built by and for, so that communities' needs are met and everyone can belong, participate, and thrive.”

Read the full report here  
[womentransformingcities.org/hppc](https://womentransformingcities.org/hppc)

Learn more at [womentransformingcities.org](https://womentransformingcities.org)