

SEPTEMBER 2026

IN THE KNOW

UPDATES FROM VANCOUVER MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES

INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

On August 31, communities around the world marked **International Overdose Awareness Day**, a day to remember those who have died or been permanently affected by overdose, acknowledge the grief carried by families and communities, and strengthen our collective commitment to preventing future deaths.

This year's theme, **"25 Years On. Still Needed."**, recognizes 25 years of overdose awareness, advocacy, and remembrance — and the difficult reality that this work remains urgently important. For those working in Mental Health and Substance Use, overdose prevention is part of everyday care. In practice, we can support overdose prevention by:

- **Starting the conversation.** Ask about substance use in a respectful, routine and non-judgmental way.
- **Talking about overdose risk.** Consider changes in tolerance, using alone, changes in supply, mixing substances, recent abstinence, hospitalization, incarceration or other transitions that may increase risk.
- **Supporting access to naloxone and harm reduction supplies.** Check that clients and those around them know where supplies are available and how to respond to an overdose.
- **Using person-centred language.** Avoid stigmatizing assumptions and recognize the expertise people bring from their own lived and living experience.
- **Maintaining connection.** A supportive interaction, follow-up call, outreach visit or warm handoff can help reduce barriers to care and create another opportunity for safety planning.

Stigma can create barriers to disclosure, care and connection. When people anticipate judgment because of their substance use, they may be less likely to share what they are using, ask questions, seek help or return to services. Trauma-informed, culturally safe and person-centred care creates opportunities for more honest conversations about risk and safety.

International Overdose Awareness Day is also a time to recognize the impact of the toxic drug crisis on families, peers, communities and health-care workers. Many of us have supported people through overdose, responded to emergencies, grieved the loss of clients, or witnessed the ongoing effects.

Twenty-five years on, this day is still needed — and overdose prevention continues every day through connection, compassion and practical support.





WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY: CREATING HOPE THROUGH CONNECTION

September 10 marked World Suicide Prevention Day, a time to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and recognize the important role that connection, compassion, and community play in promoting mental well-being. This year's message reminds us that meaningful conversations and acts of kindness can make a difference in the lives of those around us.

At Vancouver Coastal Health, we are committed to supporting the mental health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. Through ongoing suicide prevention initiatives, evidence-informed practices, and enhanced pathways to care, we continue to strengthen the support available to those who need it.

World Suicide Prevention Day is also an opportunity to reflect on how we can create a culture of belonging and support. Whether it is checking in with a friend, listening without judgment, or simply showing kindness, small actions can help build stronger and more connected communities.

Together, we can create hope through connection and help ensure that everyone feels valued, supported, and cared for.

NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

September 30 marks the **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation** and **Orange Shirt Day** — a day to honour residential school survivors, the children who never returned home, their families and communities, and to recognize the ongoing impacts of colonialism.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was established in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and creates space for remembrance, learning and reflection. Orange Shirt Day carries the message that **Every Child Matters** and reminds us of the harms caused by residential schools and the lasting effects on individuals, families and communities.

For those working in Mental Health and Substance Use, this history is directly connected to our practice. The impacts of colonization, including residential schools, forced displacement, disruption of families and communities, and loss of language and culture, continue to influence health and wellness across generations.

Indigenous Peoples also continue to experience racism, discrimination and barriers within health-care systems. In MHSU, culturally safe care means recognizing these realities, reflecting on our own assumptions and biases, and working to create care that supports safety, choice, dignity, trust and connection.

September 30 is an opportunity to consider how reconciliation can show up in our everyday work.

We can ask ourselves:

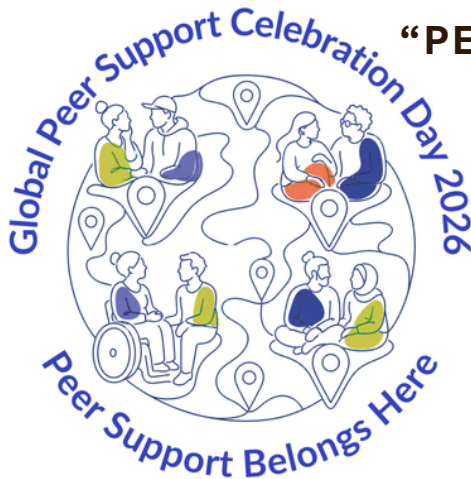
- How might experiences of colonialism and racism affect a person's trust in health care?
- How can we create greater safety, choice and respect in our interactions?
- Are we making space for Indigenous perspectives on wellness, family, community and healing?
- What can we continue to learn or change in our own practice?

Reconciliation is ongoing work. September 30 gives us an opportunity to remember, listen and learn, and carry that learning into the care we provide throughout the year.



GLOBAL PEER SUPPORT CELEBRATION DAY:

“PEER SUPPORT BELONGS HERE”



Global Peer Support Celebration Day is coming up on **Thursday, October 15, 2026**, and this year's theme is **Peer Support Belongs Here**.

The campaign recognizes lived and living experience as a valuable form of expertise and affirms that peer support belongs wherever people seek understanding, hope, and connection - including within healthcare, education, workplaces, community organizations, and beyond.

At VCH this observance is even more fitting as this year we have seen an increase in the number of peer support roles within the organization. In Vancouver Community, work to support this expansion, and pave the way for future growth, is being led by the VC Peer Leader's Group. In addition to guidance around best practices the group is working on standardizing existing processes so we can continue to support other programs to welcome workers with lived and living experience into their workplaces. If this piques your curiosity, please feel free to reach out to the group for more information, we'd love to hear from you!

vcpeerleaders@vch.ca

Fun fact – VC has had MHSU team peer support workers since the late 1990's!



MHSU DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

CQI: continuous quality improvement; a process that encourages MHSU teams to ask the questions, “How are we doing?” and “Can we do it better?”. It is a systematic, long-term method to improve the quality of client care and client outcome.

VC: Vancouver community services provided by Vancouver Coastal Health

Please visit the [Shared Organizational Portal \(SHOP\)](#) website to view the latest organizational policies and procedures.