



March 25th, 2022

**Re: UBC's Response to BC's Overdose Public Health Emergency and Harm Reduction Efforts**

Dear Governors,

This submission is being made on behalf of the Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC Vancouver in regards to UBC's inaction on student health and safety, more specifically the overdose crisis since declared as a Public Health Emergency in April 2016. In response to the "Culture of Care" presentation at the People, Community and International Committee on March 16th, 2022, the Alma Mater Society expresses its disappointment over the University's lack of effort to directly take action to support impactful harm reduction initiatives on campus.

As shown in the presentation, harm reduction related to drug overdose is a rising concern among the UBC student population as the distribution of toxic illicit drugs has grown exponentially over the past 6 years. Despite this trend, UBC has yet to partake in any ground work and organizing to reduce drug overdoses on campus. Most of the harm reduction efforts on campus have been led by student groups, most evidently shown through the creation of the Harm Reduction Coalition that meets biweekly to discuss collaboration opportunities between the UBC Social Justice Center and the Alma Mater Society's Academic and University Affairs office. The "Culture of Care" presentation at the PCI Committee on March 16th communicated that aims to address the Overdose Public Health Emergency have been achieved through "collaboration, communications, education and distribution of harm reduction tools." Frankly, we feel that there has been minutest meaningful collaboration with the student groups from UBC administratives on harm reduction initiatives. It is later stated that UBC has expanded "work with Greek Life & AMS groups," yet there is a consistent pattern of student groups leading this work. This is not a result of student groups wanting to exclusively view harm reduction as a peer to peer effort, rather it is exasperation with UBC's lack of a unified strategy to address this crisis with the urgency that is required.

There are several immediate actions that UBC must take to strengthen harm reduction services. First, spectrometer testing for drugs alongside fentanyl and benzodiazepine test strips should be available across campus. While test strips are more sensitive and are able to determine whether any substances are present, a Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) machine can approximate percentages of what is in a sample as long as it is a concentration of 5-10% or more. UBC Okanagan has actively been collaborating with their Harm Reduction Team (HaRT) to provide confidential drug checking services including spectrometer testing, single-use injection and inhalation supplies, workshops, and overdose awareness training open for everyone in their

community. However, UBC Vancouver has not made parallel efforts to provide these services or existing resources to the same level of accessibility for its students, staff, and faculty.

In addition, a medical amnesty policy for drug overdose reports in residences should be established to protect students from disciplinary repercussions when calling emergency services. A clear and well-established medical amnesty policy will make it easier for students to seek help in case of alcohol or drug related emergencies without the fear of facing sanctions by the Institution. Above all else, student health and safety should be UBC's first priority.

While UBC does offer "First Aid for the Toxic Drug Supply" and "Opioid Overdose First Aid" courses on Canvas, these resources are not as effective as in-person training or other interactive educational workshops. Furthermore, several links on the UBC Vancouver "[Alcohol and Other Drugs](#)" page redirect students to government or harm reduction websites that do not address the specified topic. For instance, there are no clear directions as to how to get drugs checked and students must go through several websites to find the relevant information.

The University must actively participate and collaborate with the student groups responsible for their claims of harm reduction successes – including having a representative at bi-weekly meetings with the UBC Harm Reduction Coalition and working with the Alma Mater Society. It was concerning to see that there is a misplaced sense of confidence about the degree to which the university is successfully executing a harm reduction strategy. It is essential to remember that there is a long way to go if UBC as an institution wishes to make genuine strides in addressing the crisis.

We do extend thanks to the University Executives and Board of Governors for their continued commitment to ensuring student health and wellness. Without discourse, collaboration, and feedback, we wouldn't be able to excel as an institution. We do hope to see the spirit of care continue and look forward to working with UBC to take tangible steps to alleviate the effects of the overdose public health emergency on campus.

Sincerely,



**Eshana Bhangu**

Vice President, Academic and University Affairs  
Alma Mater Society



**Cole Evans**

President  
Alma Mater Society