

## **B.C. Community Action Teams share concerns around treatment of decampments without adequate solutions**

On the morning of April 5th, 2023, the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Police Department began the forced displacement of residents of East Hastings. These institutions are engaging in the inhumane and undignified displacement of houseless community members in the DTES without adequate housing or shelter solutions. These community members experience low-income status, houselessness, and face systematic disadvantages, and are now faced with the harm and trauma caused by forced displacement. As Community Action Teams, we condemn these acts of brutality against the most vulnerable members of our community. These actions are particularly appalling given the targeting of people who are at high risk of experiencing unsafe living conditions. This violent perpetuation of policies which dehumanize and victimize unhoused people must stop.

The callous disregard shown in the methods used to enforce this displacement may have long reaching consequences for vulnerable community members across B.C. and beyond. While the stated purpose of this ongoing displacement is the creation of safer and more livable communities, it begs the question: safer and more livable communities for whom? The practice of street sweeps has shown to exacerbate the already unstable conditions for people living in precarious housing situations. The actions taken by the City of Vancouver and Vancouver Police Department have not improved the safety or well-being of the people living in the DTES. On the contrary, these actions have limited access to essential services such as clinics, pharmacies, food, and outreach programs, making it even more difficult for people to obtain the resources they require to stay safe and healthy. We demand that the City of Vancouver take immediate action to put a stop to the continued and repeated violent acts of decampments and street sweeps.

The B.C. CAT's (Community Action Teams) aim to develop partnerships and strategies to address the overdose crisis on a local level, creating action plans within high priority communities/municipalities, and escalating barriers to effective response to the provincial level as needed. Many who are affected by street sweeps are also people who use drugs. We are concerned that these harms caused by the City of Vancouver and Vancouver Police Department will increase the challenges faced by people who use drugs and create a domino effect in other cities with encampments. Since the declaration of a Public Health emergency due to toxic drug supply was announced in 2016, over 11,000 loved ones' lives have been lost. The staggering number of deaths continue to rise as our community suffers from the effects of toxic drug supply, the COVID pandemic and a housing crisis. Decampments isolate people who use drugs, limit their resources, and perpetuate negative stigma, thus putting them at even greater risk for overdose death. The DTES is already burdened with some of the highest rates of death due to toxic drug supply; urgent action is needed to combat this. The impact of these decampments go beyond just the immediate community: the collective grief, stress, and frustration resonates throughout the province of British Columbia. The City's support and action on Safe Supply and adequate housing for people who use drugs is crucial in reducing the number of deaths and preventing further harm to our society.

The City of Vancouver and Vancouver Police Department operate on the unceded lands of the x̱məθkwə́yəm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations. The City of Vancouver has approved several plans, frameworks, and motions which promote community building, reconciliation, and support for unsheltered residents. However, the continued practice of inhumane decampments undermines these efforts and their stated goals of reconciliation. Recent and continued street sweeps are consistent with infringements of Indigenous rights and UNDRIP. The disproportionate impacts of houselessness for Indigenous peoples, particularly women and young people living with disabilities, leads to increased incidents of violence. We call on all levels of government and the Housing Ministry to immediately provide safe, sustainable, and accessible housing options and uphold the dignity and human rights of those experiencing houselessness. Urgent action is necessary—in alignment with the UN Declaration, MMIWG2S Calls for Justice, and Red Women Rising—to end the daily violence targeting houseless Indigenous community members in the DTES.

The lack of community engagement in the displacement has had far-reaching and devastating consequences throughout the DTES. By failing to adequately consult and engage with community members, the City of Vancouver has undermined public trust and created an environment of hostility and mistrust between residents and officials. To truly make the neighborhood safer for all, it is critical to prioritize increasing the capacity of low-barrier, welfare rate, social housing programs, and invest in safe supply solutions. Providing stable, secure housing options is the most effective way to ensure the safety and security of vulnerable community members and eliminate the need for future decampment. Furthermore, the ministry and City must work closely together to address the social and economic challenges faced by citizens who experience harm due to homelessness, poverty, and systemic inequalities. Without meaningful engagement with community members, the City of Vancouver cannot hope to effectively address the root causes of harm and insecurity in the DTES. Only by working collaboratively with affected communities, investing in proven social support mechanisms, and prioritizing the needs of houseless residents can the City of Vancouver hope to create a safe, resilient, and inclusive environment for all.

On behalf of Community Action Teams throughout B.C. and in solidarity with the DTES communities impacted by this devastation,

- **Vancouver CAT**
- **Langley CAT**
- **Burnaby CAT**
- **Surrey CAT**
- **Chilliwack CAT**
- **Sunshine Coast CAT**
- **Comox Valley CAT**
- **Victoria CAT**
- **Port Alberni CAT**
- **Moving Mountains CAT (Cranbrook)**
- **Ridge Meadows CAT**
- **Qathet CAT (Powell River)**
- **Nanaimo CAT**
- **Williams Lake CAT**
- **Prince George CAT**
- **Cowichan CAT**
- **Dawson Creek CAT**
- **Fort St. John CAT**
- **Trail CAT**

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