



# Annual Report

2023 - 2024

We acknowledge that our work takes place on the unceded traditional homelands of the Coast Salish Peoples. Specifically, our office is on the homelands of the skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), selílwitulh (Tseil-Waututh), and xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations.

**Cover:** Penticton and Area Overdose Prevention Society, PPN Grantee

**Left:** Dragonfly House - Hiyeyu Lelum, CCF Grantee



# About CAI

Founded in 2008, Community Action Initiative is a nonprofit organization transforming how we address mental health and substance use (MHSU) challenges in B.C. through trust-based granting, immersive community engagement, and capacity building.

As an essential connector between grassroots organizations and government, we translate rich community insights into actionable public health frameworks that empower communities to design—and lead—their own solutions. This involves aligning specific local needs with provincial priorities, ensuring local voices actively shape MHSU resource allocation, and programming.

We're driven by the belief that harnessing community wisdom, lived experiences, and diverse perspectives is essential for nurturing better public health outcomes. And that's how we're fostering equitable MHSU initiatives across B.C.—through a more collective, human-centred approach that truly serves all.

## Our Mission

To strengthen the role and capacity of the community sector to improve mental health and address substance use for British Columbians.

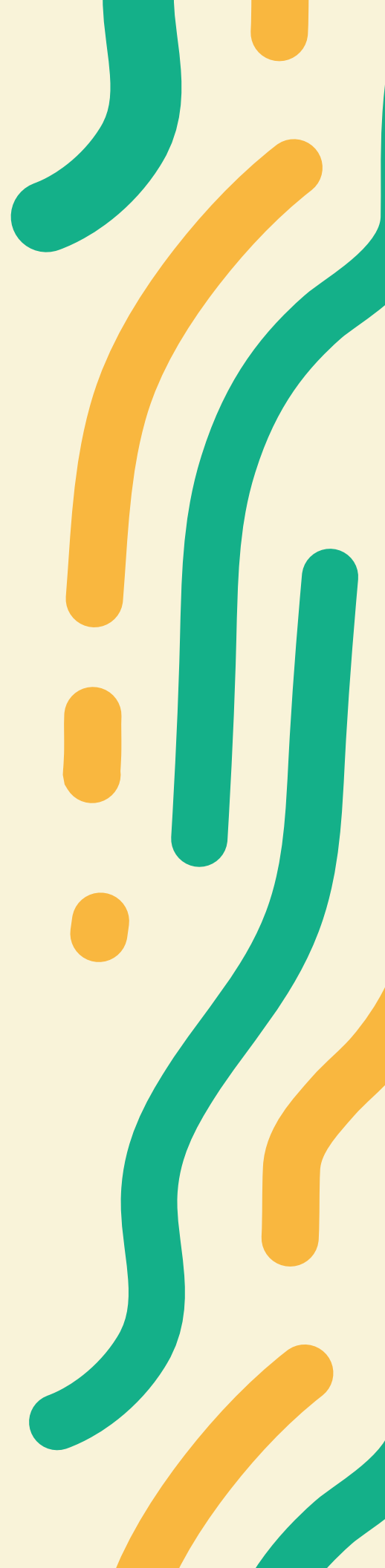
## Our Vision

Community-based agencies are essential partners in addressing mental health and substance use in BC.

With gratitude to our funder:



Ministry of  
Mental Health  
and Addictions



# Executive Message



Over the last 16 years, both CAI and the mental health and substance use sector have been on a journey. In 2008, CAI was asked to bring the sector together, and to support the Ministry of Health to be more strategic and coordinated in their approach to funding. Since that time, both our organization and the sector we support have changed dramatically. Today, we have a separate Ministry for Mental Health and Substance Use; we have a growing sector that includes both nonprofit and for-profit entities; we have people with lived experience sitting at decision making tables; we have new language around mental health and substance use; and along with all of that, we have new challenges.

We have a drug poisoning crisis that has taken the lives of over 14,000 people across BC and has caused profound brain injury for many more; we have families reeling from loss and facing uncertainty and gaps; and we have cities and towns grappling with overlapping gaps in housing, care and services. We also have so many more people on the front lines of this work who show up every day and look into the faces of those needing support. These are the peers, the outreach workers, the mental health and substance use service providers, and the Elders who take the time to see the humanity in each person and walk alongside them as they take their next step.

I joined CAI in January 2024. It wasn't to escape my work as a front line non profit provider; it was to find ways to bring us back together, to share learnings, to help sustain our sector and to move us forward together. While the first few months of my time here have been focused on establishing CAI as a fully independent non profit with its own operational infrastructure, I now have the privilege of listening and nurturing the mental health and substance use community that holds the deep knowledge to respond to the challenges we are facing. Best of all, I get to work with the wonderful team and Board at CAI to make this happen.

Julia Kaisla  
Executive Director





## Staff

Julia Kaisla - Executive Director (Starting January 2024)

Emily Wagner - Interim Executive Director (December 2021-December 2023)

Mira Abou Farrage - Program Manager - Grants & Community Funding

Noah Chalifoux - Project Manager - Local Leadership United

Andrea Derban - Clinical Lead, Episodic Overdose Prevention Sites (e-OPS)

Dakota Fayant-McLeod - Communications Coordinator

Anna Harcourt - Project Manager - Provincial Peer Network

Peter Hoong - Project Manager - Community Action Teams

Noni Nabors - Executive Assistant

Janine Stevenson - Director of Strategic Initiatives & Special Projects/Local Leadership United

Zavi Swain - Manager - Recovery Community Grants

Adrienne Yeung - Community Grants Manager - Community Counselling

## Board of Directors

Vanessa Wideski - Chairperson

Dawn Dunlop - Treasurer

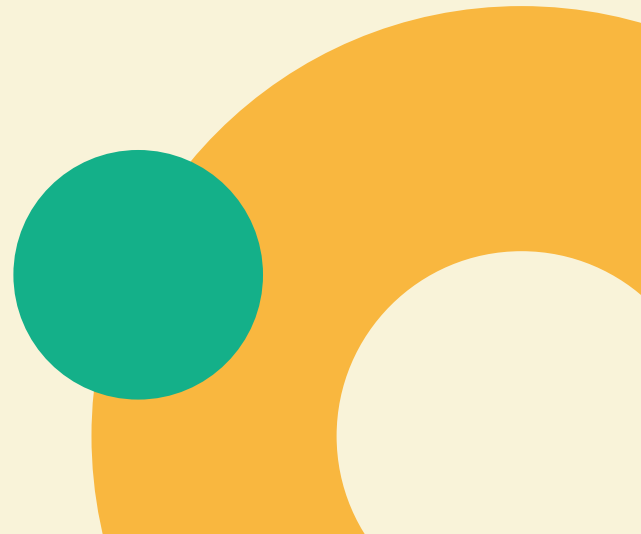
Jill Fikowski

Joanna Gislason

Kamaldeep Parmar

Ahmad Soleiman Panah

Vanessa Tong





# Partnering with Community

**Community Action Initiative works to support the Overdose Emergency Response Centre by disseminating funds and building capacity for communities to respond to the toxic drug crisis.**

The following three projects form the three pillars of CAI's response:

- Establishing Community Action Teams
- Enhancing Drug User Groups
- Leading Municipal Dialogues

These three intersecting approaches allow the many stakeholders in community to learn and respond to the challenges of the toxic drug crisis in a coordinated way.

**Community Action Teams (CATs)** were created to help bring together health authorities, public health, nonprofit organizations, government representatives, peer groups, and others to develop partnerships to provide focused, action-oriented strategies tailored to local community needs. CAI provides annualized funding and supports capacity building for these teams. There are 38 funded CATs across the province.

The goal of the **Provincial Peer Network (PPN)** is to strengthen collaboration and information sharing between drug user-led organizations by developing a network. Through regional and provincial capacity building, it works to ensure that the provincial overdose response is effective in saving lives and connecting people to harm reduction, treatment, and recovery. There are 23 PPN groups for which CAI provides annualized funding and support for capacity building

**Local Leadership United (LLU)** is a project that aims to support local governments, particularly elected officials, with the work communities are already doing to respond to the toxic drug poisoning crisis. LLU hosts full day trainings, presents at conferences and municipal events, and hosts a monthly network meeting to provide ongoing education. In 2023-2024, there were 25 LLU events across BC.

**Photos From Top Left to Right:** Circle of Indigenous Nations Society Castlegar - CCF Grantee, Hope CAT, Surrey CAT, Langley CAT



**CAI also works alongside the Community Mental Health and Substance Use sector to build capacity and disseminate funds in coordination with government partners.**

For the past four years, CAI has stewarded the **Community Counselling Fund (CCF)**, which supports 49 community-based organizations to deliver free/low cost, culturally relevant mental health care. These organizations are situated in every health authority in both urban and rural communities. Our equity-focused approach ensures that adults from all walks of life can access quality mental health supports. In 2023-2024, 10,766 counselling sessions were funded through the CCF.

**Strategic Granting** in the support recovery sector includes support to the BC Centre on Substance Use for development of a sector-wide recovery workforce training, and to the BC Addiction Recovery Association for capacity building and provincial knowledge exchange projects.

In 2024, the **Capacity Building Grant for First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous led Bed-based Treatment and Recovery Operators** was rolled out. Up to \$25,000 was made available to First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous led organizations that provide bed-based treatment and recovery services in order to develop and/or implement capacity building strategies within their organization.

**Bottom:** Kwakiutl First Nation - CCF Grantee

**Right:** Maple Ridge CAT







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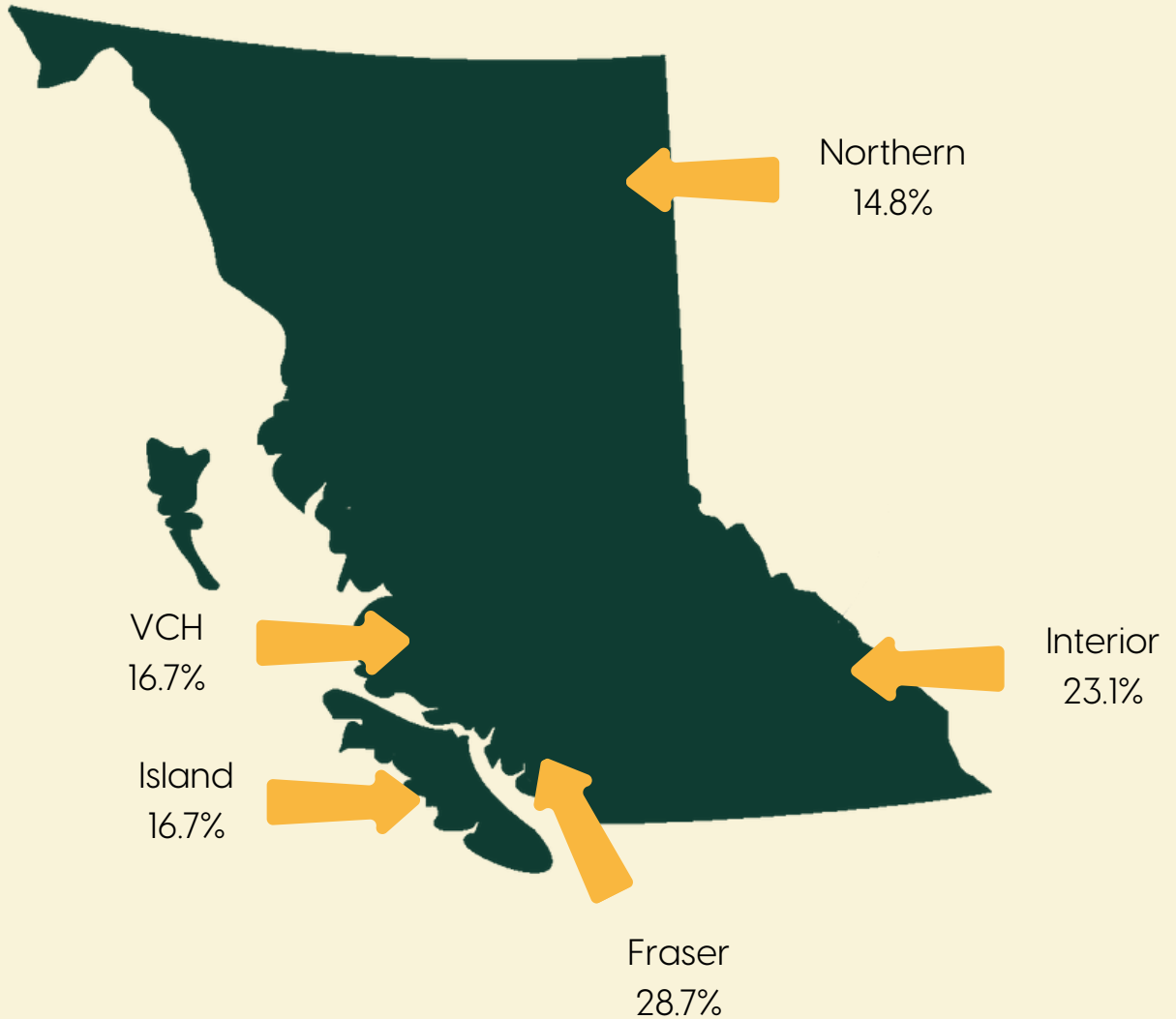
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# Our Impact

## Grants Across Health Authorities:



**\$16,915,659** In Grants

**38** CATs

**25** LLU Workshops

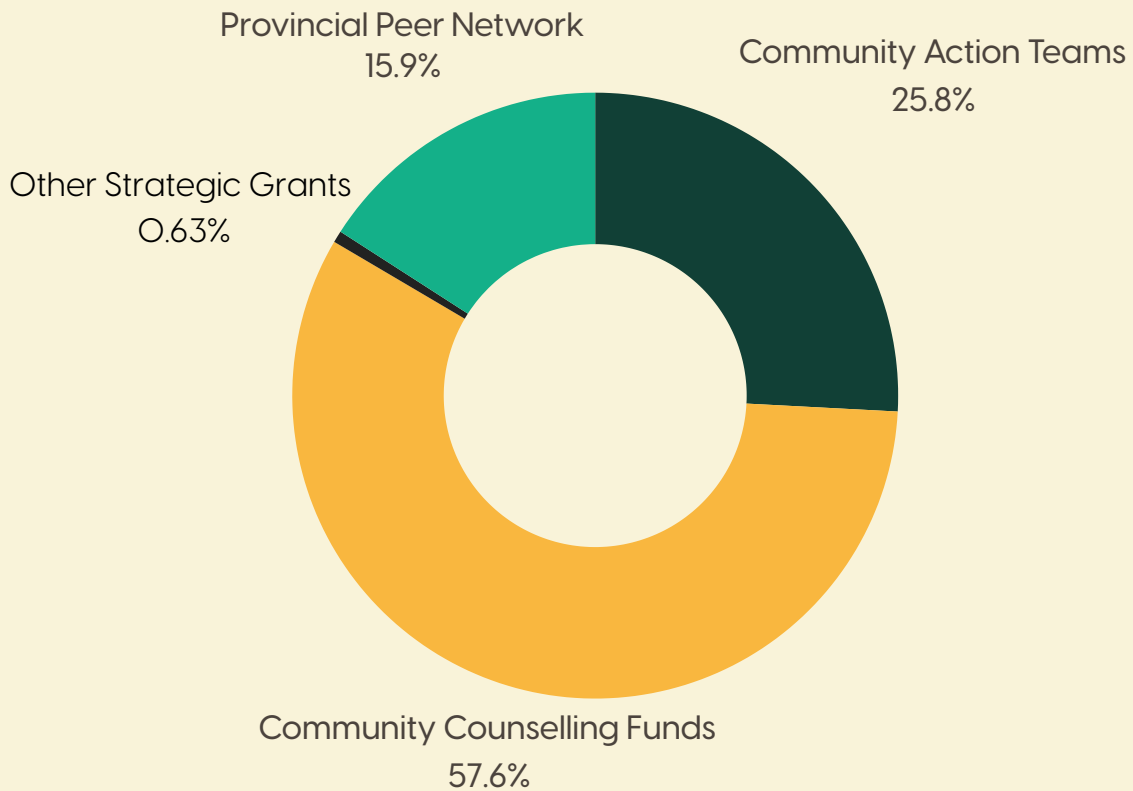
**23** PPN Groups

**49** Counselling Grantees

# Financial Overview

## Total grants distributed

\$16,915,659



**Note:** Effective July 28, 2024, Community Action Initiative Society of BC began receiving and disseminating funds as a fully independent organization, separate from the Canadian Mental Health Association, B.C. Division, who had acted as our fiscal agent.

Notably, CAI's separation from CMHA BC included a full assignment of rights and responsibilities from CMHA BC to CAI in relation to both the project funding agreements with the Province of BC and the subproject and other grant agreements with grantees.

[Visit our website to access our 2023 Audited Financial Statements.](#)



In 2023, 2,511 British Columbians lost their lives to the toxic drug crisis.  
Our work is dedicated to their memory.



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