



Caring Conversations

Nothing About Us Without Us

Artwork by Margaret, a person with lived and living experience.

Caring Conversations

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This QR code will take you to the Affinity website to access a virtual version of the Caring Conversations Cards for Health Care Providers (slightly different from this version).

Caring Conversations

How to use this card deck

There are a variety of ways to utilize these cards. Start in a place of humility and be open to shared learning. Pull one card from the deck to read aloud. Spend a moment reflecting before answering. Be honest.

Have an open mind and learn from your friends and family by sharing. We recommend using one card at a time.

Sometimes the questions asked can create unexpected or intense emotions. Know what supports and resources are available to you. If you are not sure, we have included resources for staff as well.



Harm Reduction starts with Caring Conversations

Caring Conversations Cards were designed to promote meaningful conversation about harm reduction, trauma-and- violence-informed approach, and cultural humility for cultural safety.

These cards help stimulate conversation with your friends and family, other community members, or they can be used for self-reflection. The intention of the card deck is to provide an easy, safe and thoughtful way to explore de-stigmatizing substance use.

The questions have been developed by people with lived and living experience who have accessed Island Health services along with Island Health staff with knowledge and experience in these topics.



Vocabulary



Island Health

Vocabulary

Harm Reduction means reducing the negative health, social, and legal impacts of substance use, while honouring each person's choices, needs, and goals.

- Some examples of Harm Reduction:
 - Providing clean supplies and overdose response tools
 - Providing a safe space for people to rest, connect and/or access supports
 - Listening without judgment

A **Substance** is anything that can affect your mind and/or your body. They may be used for recreation, healing, coping, or other reasons.

- Some examples of Substances
 - Alcohol, caffeine
 - Medications
 - Opioids, narcotics

Substance Use Disorder is a medical condition where a person's relationship with a substance starts to affect their health, relationships, or daily life negatively.



Vocabulary

Cultural Safety Cultural safety goes beyond learning about another person's culture. It requires individuals and organizations to examine power imbalances, systemic barriers, and the impacts of colonialism and racism on health and wellness. Importantly, cultural safety is determined by the person receiving care—not the person providing it.

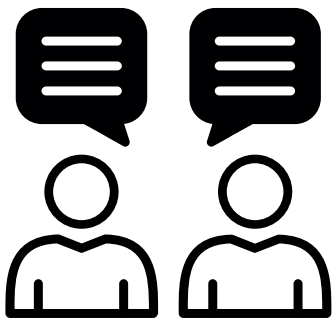
Cultural Humility means staying open, curious, and self-aware, recognizing that we don't know everything about someone's culture, and are willing to learn from them.

Trauma- and Violence-Informed Approach recognizes how trauma and violence, including systemic and structural harm, shape people's lives, and works to create safer, more respectful spaces for healing and support.

- Examples of systemic and structural harm
 - Indigenous-specific racism in healthcare
 - Eurocentric educational system
 - Laws that criminalize poverty (loitering, substance use, sleeping in public)



Challenging Conversations



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How do you have challenging conversations?

- Decide if it's worth having the conversation
- Know yourself and what's important to you
- Understand who you're engaging with and what you're trying to achieve
- Actively listen, engage empathetically, and speak up as an active participant

Source: Anti Stigma Tool Kit



Caring Conversations



**END
STIGMA**

**Harm
Reduction**

Harm Reduction

**Does the language we
use matter? Why or why
not?**



Harm Reduction

How did you learn about substance use? What were you taught and by whom?



Harm Reduction

**Cannabis became legal in
Canada in 2018.**

**Has your opinion about
cannabis changed since
then? How do you feel about
the decriminalization of
other substances?**



Harm Reduction

In what ways can laws and policies around a substance shape how people view the substance and those who use it?



Harm Reduction

**In what ways might
substances be used to
help with coping?**



Harm Reduction



**How do you manage your
own emotional and
physical pain?**



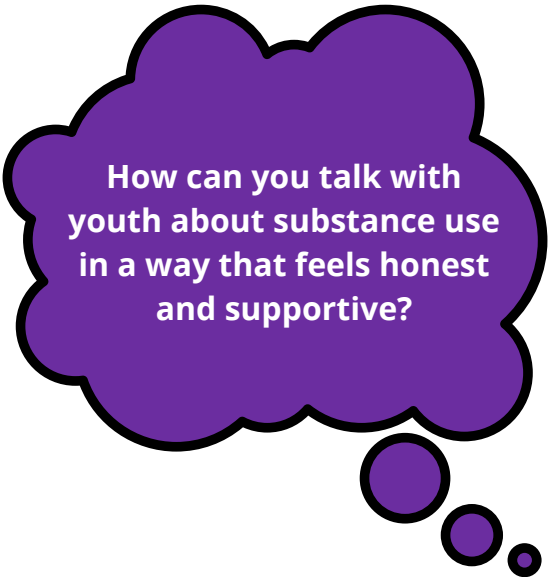
Harm Reduction

**Have you ever misjudged
someone based on a first
impression?**

**How did it make you feel, and
did you respond in any way?**



Harm Reduction



**How can you talk with
youth about substance use
in a way that feels honest
and supportive?**



Harm Reduction

How can we create respectful relationships in the wider community to reduce the divide between the community and people who use substances?



Harm Reduction

**Do you consider alcohol a
substance?
Why or why not?**



Harm Reduction

**In what ways, if any does
society normalize drinking?**



Harm Reduction

Do you believe that people who are unhoused also use substances? If yes, why?



Harm Reduction

How do community voices or discussion shape your perspective on harm-reduction?



Caring Conversations



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

Artwork by Agnes, a person with lived and living experience.

Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety



**Tell me who you are?
How did you and your
family come to these
lands?**

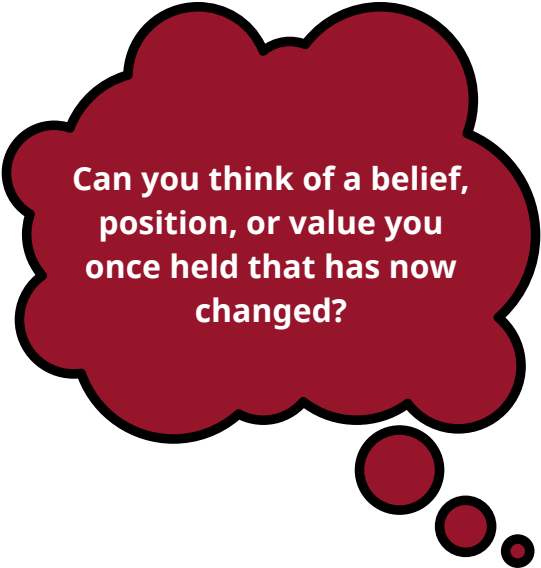


Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

**How does colonization
impact your life or the lives
of those around you?**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety



**Can you think of a belief,
position, or value you
once held that has now
changed?**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

**What does cultural safety
look like to you?**

**What does it not look
like?**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

What is racism?

**What are the roots and
drivers of racism?**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety



**What is “humility”
and why is it critical to
cultural safety?**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

**How did you learn about
Residential Schools and
Indian Hospitals?
(e.g. at school, in
community)**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

**What is your
community doing to
support culturally
safe spaces for people
who use substances,
and what still needs
to change?**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

**What is one way you
can support Indigenous
voices?**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

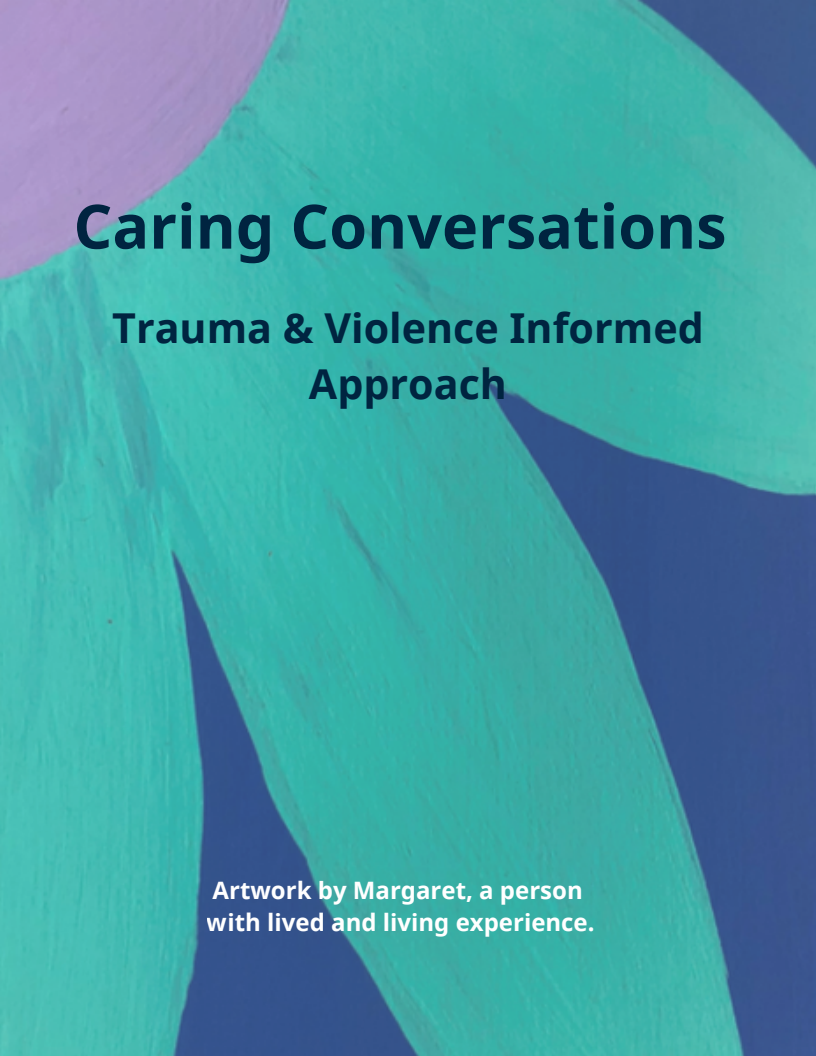
**What do you know
about the history of the
Indigenous territory
where you live and
work?**



Cultural Humility for Cultural Safety

**Where can you learn
more about the
Indigenous history and
territory on which you
live or work?**



The background of the entire page is an abstract artwork. It features large, overlapping, textured shapes in shades of teal, pink, and blue. The textures appear to be from different materials, possibly paper or fabric, giving it a layered, tactile quality. The colors are vibrant and the composition is dynamic, with the shapes flowing across the frame.

Caring Conversations

Trauma & Violence Informed Approach

**Artwork by Margaret, a person
with lived and living experience.**

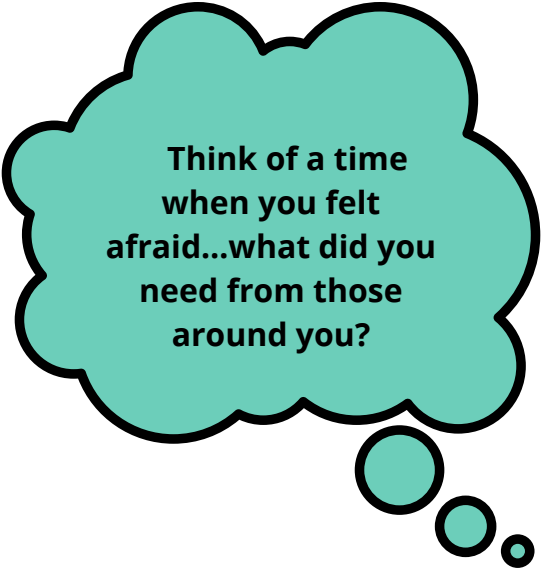
Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



**Do you think someone's
experience with trauma
affects their comfort or
ability to access
support?**



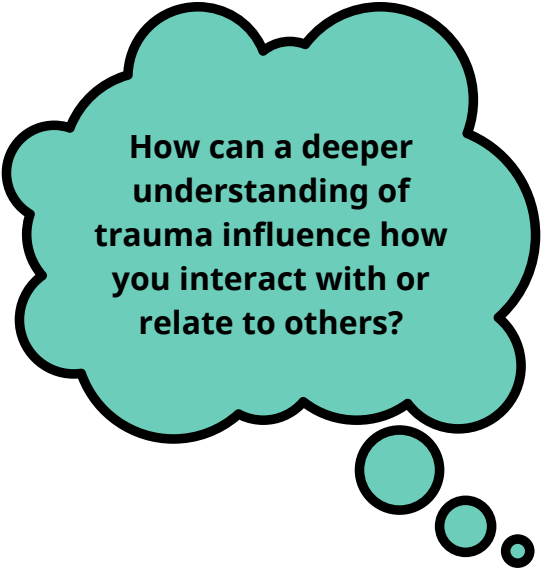
Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



**Think of a time
when you felt
afraid...what did you
need from those
around you?**



Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



How can a deeper understanding of trauma influence how you interact with or relate to others?



Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



**Where in our community
can we create space for
connection?**



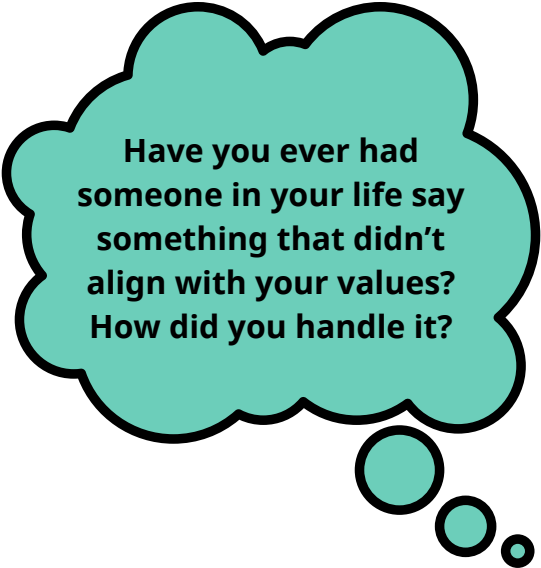
Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



**As a community member,
how can you notice and
uplift the strengths of the
people around you?**



Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



**Have you ever had
someone in your life say
something that didn't
align with your values?
How did you handle it?**



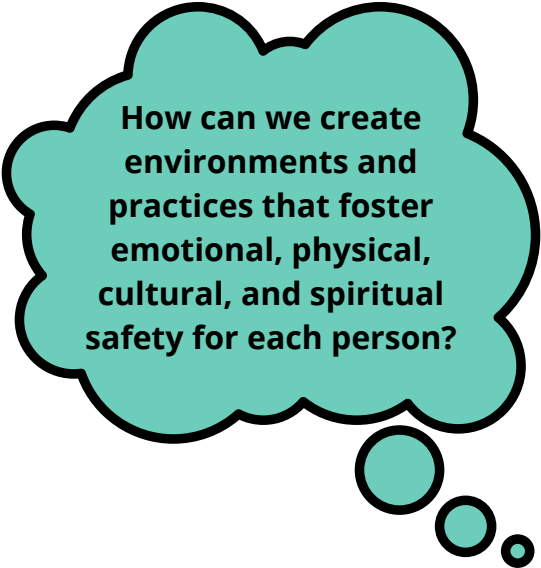
Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



**Do your values align
with the treatment of
people who use
substances in our
community, or are there
conflicts?**



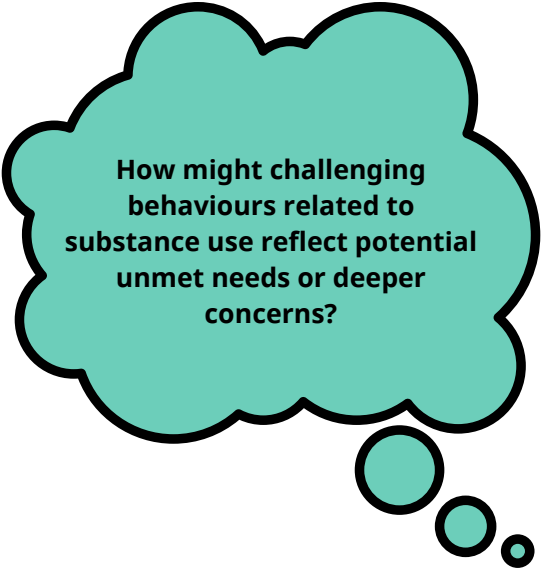
Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



How can we create environments and practices that foster emotional, physical, cultural, and spiritual safety for each person?



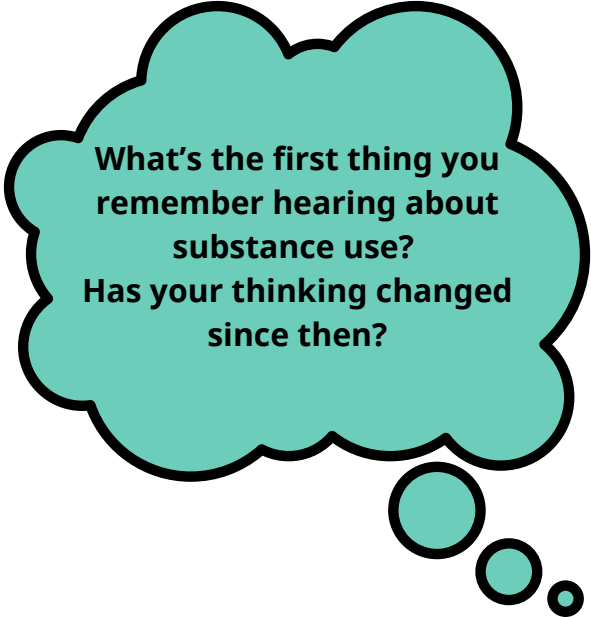
Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



How might challenging behaviours related to substance use reflect potential unmet needs or deeper concerns?



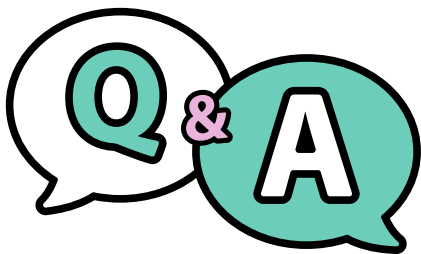
Trauma & Violence Informed Approach



**What's the first thing you
remember hearing about
substance use?
Has your thinking changed
since then?**



Caring Conversations



Q & A

**What does the phrase
“Nothing about us without us” mean?**

This slogan is used to convey that policies should not be determined without the contributions from participants within that community group.



Q & A

What is Naloxone?

Naloxone is a life-saving medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. It works by blocking opioids in the brain, helping to quickly restore normal breathing within minutes.

Naloxone is safe to use and will not cause harm if given to someone who isn't experiencing an opioid overdose. Carrying naloxone is a simple and powerful way to help save a life in your community.



Q & A

Where can you get Naloxone, and Naloxone training?

You can get free naloxone kits and training at many pharmacies, public health units, and community organizations that offer harm reduction services.



Scan for Naloxone 101 Course

- Learn how to recognize and respond to drug poisoning
- Naloxone Training
- Self-guided, interactive (1 hour)
- Additional training resources



Q & A

When was the toxic drug crisis declared in British Columbia?

April 14, 2016

- Drug Toxicity is the leading cause of death in British Columbia for people aged 10-59
- Since 2016, more than 20,000 lives have been lost to unregulated drug toxicity (2025)

Source: *Stopping the Harm: Decriminalization of People who Use Drugs in BC*, Provincial Health Officers Special Report

Source: BC Coroners Services shares 2024 data into unregulated drug toxicity deaths, Government of BC



Q & A

When and where was North America's first legal supervised injection site opened?

Insite was opened in Vancouver in 2003.



Q & A

Why do we need a harm reduction policy?

Harm reduction save lives by providing safer options and helps to improve the health of people who use substances.

Some examples of everyday harm reduction solutions include:

- Seat belts, helmets, applying sunscreen, condoms

Source: Harm Reduction International website



Q & A

When did alcohol prohibition begin in Canada?

Prohibition was first enacted at the provincial level in Prince Edward Island in 1901. Other provinces followed, but not until the 1910s. Prince Edward Island did not repeal prohibition until 1948.

*Source: UVIC Canadian Institute of Substance Use
Research Drug History Timeline*



Q & A

Is substance use a choice?

No. Substance Use Disorder is driven by complex social and health factors, not simply the substances themselves, and stopping is far more complicated than “just saying no.”

Abstinence is also not expected in other situations; why should we expect it here? The goal of abstinence may not be realistic or appropriate for everyone, and options for support extend beyond treatment to include a range of harm reduction strategies that meet people where they are.

Source: Harm Reduction and Shelters by Shila LeBlanc (2018)



Q & A

Is harm reduction just about substance use?

Harm reduction applies to many human behaviors, not just substance use.

From seat belts to condoms to designated drivers, most of us engage in some form of harm reduction everyday.

Source: HRSS, BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services: Harm Reduction Training Manual (2011)



Q & A

Is harm reduction a replacement for abstinence-based recovery?

Harm reduction neither supports nor opposes abstinence.

Harm reduction's main goal is to keep people alive and as healthy as possible.

Whether harm reduction introduces someone to abstaining or product substitution, these safer options result in improved health outcomes

Source: National Harm Reduction Coalition website



Q & A

Do you know what the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act is?

The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act provides some legal protections for people who experience or witness a drug poisoning and call 911 or their local emergency number for help.



Q & A

Why is there so much focus on "stigma?" How do we know it's such a problem?

Stigma decreases accessibility and quality of health care causing avoidance or delay of health care and non-disclosure of health conditions.

This can increase the severity of symptoms and result in higher rates of hospitalization, emergency room visits, and healthcare related costs.

Source: Island Health's Infographic: The Effects of Substance Use Stigma



Q & A

Do you know what safe drug testing services are and how they work?

A safe drug checking site allows individuals to have their substances tested for contaminants in a non-judgmental, confidential environment.

These services are important because they reduce the risk of overdose and poisoning from the toxic, unpredictable street supply, empower people with knowledge to make safer choices, and build trust by meeting individuals where they are without requiring abstinence.

Drug checking also connects people to health resources and community supports, making it a vital harm reduction strategy that saves lives.

Q & A

What can I do to promote harm reduction in my community?

- Learn what harm reduction means and why it saves lives.
- Use inclusive language
- Talk openly about harm reduction to reduce stigma around substance use.
- Share accurate information with friends, family, and on social media.
- Carry naloxone and know how to use it in case of an overdose emergency.
- Support local organizations that provide things like clean supplies, naloxone kits, and education.



Q & A

Why does language matter? How can I make sure I am using it respectfully?

Language helps create safer, more inclusive spaces where people feel respected and supported. Respectful language can reduce stigma, encourage connection, and promote dignity for everyone, especially those who use substances or face marginalization. It's about recognizing each other's humanity.

- Use person-first language
 - “someone who uses substances” vs. “drug addict.”



Resources

Indigenous Support

Tsow-Tun Le Lum Society Crisis Line

1-888-403-3123

Kuu-Us Crisis Line

If you are facing a difficult situation, call us now. We can help.

- Adults/Elders (250-723-4050)
- Child/Youth (250-723-2040)
- Toll free (1-800-588-8717)
- Métis Line (1-833-MétisBC)



Island Health

Resources

General Support

310-Mental Health

Call 310-6789 (no area code needed) toll-free anywhere in B.C. to access emotional support, information and resources specific to mental health and substance use issues. Available 24/7.

Moms Stop the Harm

A network of Canadian Families impacted by substance use related harms and deaths.

www.momstoptheharm.com



Island Health

Resources

General Support

1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) Available 24/7. If you or someone you know is in crisis.

Vancouver Island Crisis Line:

1-888-494-3888

Available 24/7. For emotional support, crisis response and information.

9-8-8

Available 24/7, text and chat access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing a mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress.



Island Health

Resources

Opioid Treatment Access Line 1-833-804-8111

Access same-day care for opioid addiction.

Access Central 1-888-885-8824

Same-day assessment and support for withdrawal management.

Individualized care planning and coordination, including transportation to services.



Island Health

Resources

Drug Poisoning Response Apps

National Overdoses Response Service (NORS)

NORS is a drug poisoning prevention hotline for Canadians that provides loving, confidential, nonjudgmental support for you, whenever and wherever you use drugs.

1-888-688-NORS (6677)

<https://www.nors.ca/>

LifeGuard App

Anonymous, life-saving technology that provides a direct link to emergency services if a drug poisoning occurs. Additional features of the app include Naloxone and CPR guidance, drug alerts, and direct access to local mental health and addiction support services.

Download the App to your cell phone:

<https://lifeguarddh.com/>

Sign-up for Toxic Drug Alerts

Toward the Heart and BCCDC

An anonymous, free, real-time text messaging service for anyone to receive toxic drug alerts or share information about toxic drugs in their community.

To sign up, text the word JOIN to 253787 (ALERTS)

<https://towardtheheart.com/alerts>



Island Health

Acknowledgements



We wish to sincerely thank all the people who contributed to the development of the Caring Conversation Cards:

- BC Centre of Disease Control & Professional Ethical Engagement of Peers (PEEP)
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- Cowichan Community Action Teams
- Culturally Committed Elders and Indigenous Mentors
- First Nations Health Authority
- Harm Reduction Allies
- Harm Reduction Coordinators from other Provincial Health Authorities
- Island Health Community Health Promoters
- Island Health Harm Reduction Coordinators
- Island Health Indigenous Health
- Island Health Simulation
- Métis Nation British Columbia
- Moms Stop the Harm
- People with lived and living experiences on Vancouver Island



Island Health

Virtual Caring Conversations Cards



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Affinity website to access a virtual
version of the
Caring Conversations Cards



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Version 1 - Community June 2026