

FACT SHEET #5: HARM REDUCTION

BACKGROUND

Is your event a multi-day music festival? A sports event where alcohol will be served? Many planned events involve challenges with respect to alcohol and other drug use. It is important for event organizers and local authorities to have a sense of what to anticipate, and how they can play a key role in preventing or reducing harm for people attending the event. (This fact sheet is part of *Public Health Guidelines: Major Planned Events*. See “Resources,” below, for details.)

The term “harm reduction” refers to a pragmatic, humane approach that focuses on minimizing death, disease and injury associated with higher risk behaviour, while recognizing that the behaviour may continue despite the risks. Harm reduction is an effective public health approach to issues concerning psychoactive substance use, including the use of alcohol and other drugs. Effective design and delivery of harm reduction programs require the input and inclusion of peers (i.e., people who have been part of the population or community, with knowledge gained from lived experience).

Things to consider when planning an event include the number and demographics of event attendees (e.g., age and subculture), potential for overcrowding, planned activities and noise levels, the extent to which alcohol or other drugs may be present, and how these issues may impact the risk of violence and other harms.

ALCOHOL

Alcohol intoxication is a major contributor to violence and injury. Event organizers can help prevent violence and injury at events by managing the availability of alcohol and strategically designing environments where alcohol is served.¹

If you want to serve alcohol in a public place or sell alcohol in any unlicensed location, you will need to obtain either a private or public Special Occasion License.² The local liquor inspector will work directly with the event organizer, and often with the local police, to ensure all vendors and premises are appropriately licensed and trained.

OTHER DRUGS

Major planned events, particularly some kinds of music festivals, may involve the use of pharmaceutical drugs and/or “street” or “party” drugs, the latter of which are not subject to government controls for safe manufacture, storage and distribution. The types of drugs at an event can vary widely. In addition, there are diverse risks associated with different drugs or combinations of drugs.

¹ World Health Organization. (2009). *Preventing violence by reducing the availability and harmful use of alcohol*: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/alcohol.pdf

² Special Occasion Licence: <http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/lclb/apply/special/index.htm>

Note: Special Occasion Licences are available through BC Liquor Stores and online: <https://solo.bcladb.com/>

ALCOHOL- OR OTHER DRUG-FACILITATED SEXUAL ASSAULT

An alcohol or other drug-facilitated sexual assault is a nonconsensual sexual act in which the survivor³ of the assault is incapacitated, unconscious or unable to consent due to the effects of psychoactive substances (e.g., alcohol, pharmaceutical and/or street or “party” drugs). This includes both cases where the survivor has used alcohol or other drugs voluntarily and cases where a survivor has been given a substance without their consent. Alcohol is the drug most commonly used in this kind of sexual assault, sometimes in combination with other substances.

Common settings for this crime are the survivor or assailant’s home and social situations similar to many major planned events, such as clubs or bars, where people are consuming alcohol and/or other drugs.⁴ The survivor usually knows the assailant(s) as a friend or acquaintance, including recent or lesser known acquaintances.⁵

It is difficult to know how often these assaults occur, partly because survivors often do not report sexual assaults. In addition, some substances thought to be used in drug-facilitated sexual assaults are difficult to detect in medical tests after the fact, making it difficult to verify substances used in alcohol or other drug-facilitated sexual assaults.

REDUCE THE RISK

DESIGNING THE EVENT’S PHYSICAL SPACES

A thoughtful design and layout can make a big difference in the degree of safety. Consider what your event attendees might need and where those things should be placed in relation to each other:

- Provide easily accessible, free drinking water.
- Create areas where people can safely and comfortably sit.
- Provide quiet areas for attendees to cool down and relax away from noise and crowds (sometimes called “chill out” areas or “sanctuaries”).
- Provide properly lit outdoor areas.
- Avoid crowding by ensuring clear access to washrooms and exits.
- Create space(s) where alcohol is not served or consumed, and promote these areas with signs.
- Use signs to direct people to areas where they can get help or health information, such as first aid, harm reduction information and drug checking. Medical services should be clearly marked.
- If possible, visibly mark areas where injury or accident may be more likely to occur, such as steep hills, embankments or areas with loose gravel.

³ Some people who have experienced sexual assault identify as survivors and some identify as victims; other terms are also sometimes preferred. Someone who has been through this experience should be given space to self-identify in the way that they find most helpful. This document mainly uses “survivor,” except where the word “victim” appears in the names of services or programs, but either term may be preferable in different contexts.

⁴ Olszewski, D. (2009). Sexual assaults facilitated by drugs or alcohol. *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*. 16(1): 39-52. Page 45.

⁵ Ibid.

TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM THE EVENT

- Ensure people have a safe way to get to and from the event, such as public transit, taxi and designated driver services. Transportation may be particularly important if you anticipate that event attendees will be drinking alcohol and/or using other drugs.

ALCOHOL AVAILABILITY

Responsible alcohol policies can prevent many potential problems at events, including violence, sexual assault and overdose. If there will be alcohol at the event, consider ways to make alcohol less of a focus at the event:

- Offer low-alcohol drinks.
- Limit the number of alcoholic drinks that can be bought at one time.
- Provide food and a variety of appealing nonalcoholic beverages that cost less than alcoholic drinks.
- Provide fun alternatives to drinking.
- Limit the overall supply of alcohol at the event based on estimated number of attendees.
- Offer drinking water separately from alcohol so attendees do not need to wait in the alcohol lineup to get water.

ONSITE HARM REDUCTION FOR ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

A pragmatic, nonstigmatizing attitude towards people who use alcohol and other drugs is a good first step in engaging people who may be vulnerable to drug-related harm. If you anticipate some demand among attendees for information about safer alcohol and other drug use, the local health authority can help identify local harm reduction organizations that may be able to provide education, peer engagement, and other drug-related support services.

For more information about harm reduction, see the list of suggestions at the end of this document or contact your health authority.

Other actions to take include the following:

- Ensure staff serving alcohol and the Special Occasion Licence holder have *Serving it Right* certificates.⁶
- Display information about Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines in areas where alcohol is served.^{7, 8}
- Display information about the risks of drinking during pregnancy.⁹
- Consider serving all beverages in unbreakable cups.
- Provide information about the adverse effects of mixing alcohol with other psychoactive substances, including caffeine.¹⁰
- Reach out to a local harm reduction group that provides onsite harm reduction education, peer support, harm reduction supplies, and drug/sharps disposal services (see the list at the end of this document).

⁶ This requirement may not apply at family events. See the *Serving it Right* website: <http://www.servingitright.com/>

⁷ See page 2 of *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines* (brochure): <http://ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en.pdf> (If you get a sign-in box, click CANCEL and the website will open.)

⁸ Information poster about alcohol in B.C.: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/infographic-the-ins-and-outs.pdf>

⁹ For example: <http://www.bcldb.com/corporate-social-responsibility/responsible-use/fasd-awareness>

¹⁰ *Alcohol and Caffeine: A Bad Buzz*: <http://www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/CCSA-Alcohol-and-Caffeine-Fact-Sheet-Youth-2012-en.pdf> (If you get a sign-in box, click CANCEL and the website will open.)

- Consider training/education for event staff (e.g., ticketing, security, first aid and servers) about safer drug use, as well as overdose prevention, recognition and response.¹¹
- Ask your health authority to provide medical waste (e.g., needle and syringe) disposal services for the event. You may also wish to consult the *Solid and Liquid Waste Management Fact Sheet*, also part of the *Public Health Guidelines: Major Planned Events*.
- Ensure that your event medical team has naloxone for reversing opioid overdoses.¹²

DRUG CHECKING

Pill- and powder-checking services are harm reduction interventions that help people make more informed choices about substance use. Currently, the most commonly available method of drug checking is the use of reagent tests (e.g., Marquis and Mecke), which give information about the presence or absence of a limited number of chemical compounds. Reagent tests are not available for all substances that may be found in illegal drugs, and only give information about the specific substance tested for.

Organized testing services support consumer safety and align with the public health mandate to identify public hazards. They can also contribute to early warning systems by providing information not available from any other source to health and enforcement officials on illegal drug markets and their associated risks.

COLLABORATING WITH AUTHORITIES

- In planning and holding your event, collaborate with local health authorities and community anti-violence agencies.
- Contact law enforcement and security agencies that will be involved in the event. Seek their support to facilitate non-enforcement-based approaches to reducing alcohol and other drug harm at the event.
- Work with first responder staff to review event protocols and event entry-and-exit access.

PREVENTING ALCOHOL- OR OTHER DRUG-FACILITATED SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual violence is preventable, and event organizers have a major role to play in setting a tone of respect and inclusion at events. It is important to keep in mind that stereotyping and survivor blaming is a major factor discouraging survivors from reporting and seeking help after a sexual assault.

Education campaigns directed at female attendees imply that they are solely responsible for preventing sexual assault. Such campaigns also reinforce the idea that survivors are to blame for sexual assault and that only females are sexually assaulted. It is more appropriate to direct educational materials at all event attendees and engage everyone in sexual assault prevention. Actions to take include the following:

- Work with and partner with an organization that provides education and support around sexual violence issues (e.g., a local victim-service or violence-against-women program).¹³

¹¹ *Overdose Survival Guide*:

http://towardtheheart.com/assets/uploads/files/OD_Survival_Guide_Tips_to_Save_a_Life_2012.08.29_upright_for_website.pdf

¹² Opioids are a class of drug or medication that includes morphine, heroin, methadone, fentanyl and oxycodone. They are most often prescribed for pain relief. Opioid drug overdose happens when a person takes more opioids than their body can handle. They lose control over their breathing and may lose consciousness. A lack of oxygen can lead to brain damage, cardiac arrest and death. For information on treating opioid overdose, see the HealthLinkBC file, *Treating Opioid Overdose: B.C.'s Take Home Naloxone Program*: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile118.stm> and General Information about the Take Home Naloxone Program: <http://towardtheheart.com/naloxone/>

- Provide education for event attendees about the law surrounding consent for sexual activity, such as age of consent, intoxication and consent, and verbal and nonverbal communication.¹⁴
- Provide information about where survivors of sexual violence can get support (e.g., reference VictimLinkBC¹⁵ in educational materials).
- Promote a culture of awareness and open communication with respect to consent for sexual activity. Peer support can help.
- Inform attendees about the connection between heavy drinking and the risk of becoming a perpetrator or victim of sexual assault.
- Remind all attendees about the risk inherent in accepting drinks or other psychoactive substances from another person, whether they know that person or not.
- Remind attendees to check on friends regularly during and after the event.
- Consider implementing a buddy system: designated volunteers are made available at different locations to intervene and/or provide support if someone is receiving unwanted (i.e., nonconsensual) sexual attention.
- Consider alerting and collaborating with local victim-service providers. They can provide support to those impacted by crime or violence (including sexual violence). In addition, they may be able to provide training on sexualized violence/assault and response as part of the staff's event orientation.

EVENT MEDICAL TEAM/EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

- Your medical team should have first aid training at a minimum. At least one person trained in first aid should be on site throughout the event – preferably with experience in responding to medical issues related to alcohol and other drugs.¹⁶
- Effective responses to sexual assault include providing compassionate, nonjudgmental and trauma-informed care to survivors through the medical team, as well as referral to hospital, sexual assault support services (e.g., community-based victim services) and police if desired.¹⁷
- Staff should be informed about post-assault protocols, the risk of sexually transmitted infection in cases of sexual assault, and the need for survivors to seek medical treatment such as post-exposure prophylaxis (preventive treatment).

PROVIDE INFORMATION

Now that you have a plan for reducing harms from alcohol and other drugs, make sure your attendees, volunteers, staff and collaborators know about it, and how to find support and services at the event. It may be helpful to have signs and educational material in multiple languages.

¹³ A directory of local victim-service and violence-against-women programs can be found here:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/bcs-criminal-justice-system/if-you-are-a-victim-of-a-crime>

¹⁴ For example: <http://www.consented.ca/consent/consent-and-canadian-law/>

¹⁵ VictimLink BC is a 24/7 confidential and anonymous helpline that can provide immediate crisis support and referrals for victims of sexual violence and all other crimes: <http://www.victimlinkbc.ca> or 1-800-563-0808

¹⁶ See the *British Columbia Major Planned Events Guidelines* for more detailed guidance about medical services at events: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/local-government/majorplannedeventsguidelines.pdf>

¹⁷ BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre. *Sexual Assault Service Protocols and Tools*: <http://www.bcwomens.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/sexual-assault-service-resources>

Consider hosting an awareness session for event staff and collaborating agencies to discuss public health approaches to psychoactive substances. It may be especially important for your event security and event medical team to talk through harm reduction approaches to alcohol and other drug use at the event.

STAFF TRAINING

Establish a policy for responding to alcohol or other drug use by staff or volunteers working at the event. Be advised that under the Special Occasion Licence for alcohol service, the licence holder, managers, staff, volunteers and security staff are not permitted to consume alcohol while performing their duties.¹⁸

- *Serving it Right* training is required for paid staff and the licensee under the Special Occasion Licence, unless it is a private family event (such as a wedding or family reunion).
- Train staff to recognize and respond to a suspected alcohol or other drug overdose, including how to call for medical care.¹⁹
- Ensure staff are familiar with VictimLinkBC. This is a 24/7 confidential and anonymous helpline that can provide immediate crisis support and referrals for victims of sexual violence and all other crimes (www.victimlinkbc.ca or 1-800-563-0808).

COMMUNICATION WITH ATTENDEES

- Inform attendees about any services or education initiatives that will be available at the event.
- Provide harm reduction information with tickets, on the event website, on social media, on posters and handouts. Examples of such information include *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*, information about the adverse effects of mixing alcohol with other psychoactive substances, and relevant local drug alerts.
- Inform attendees through the event website, posters or handouts about any planned initiatives to prevent sexual assault, as well as where attendees can access support resources at the event (e.g., event medical team and/or peer support).

MONITOR HEALTH RISKS

Work with the local health authority, first responders, law enforcement and security agencies, and harm reduction groups to track and analyze any incidents at the event that you think might be associated with alcohol or other drug use. Be prepared to warn attendees about contaminated/adulterated alcohol or other drugs, in case these are discovered at the event. Methods of tracking and communicating about alcohol or other drug-related health incidents at the event may vary, depending on the event's size, duration, composition and character.

Reporting a sexual assault can be daunting for survivors. Help survivors of sexual assault seek the care they feel would be most helpful. This includes offering referrals to a local victim-service or violence-against-women program, or VictimLinkBC (1-800-563-0808), for immediate crisis support. It may or may not include reporting the assault to police.

¹⁸ See *Special Occasion Licence Policy Manual*: <http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/lclb/docs-forms/lclb208-policy-specialoccasion.pdf> and *Special Occasion Licence: Major Events Terms and Conditions*: <http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/lclb/docs-forms/guides-sol-major-events.pdf>

¹⁹ *Overdose Survival Guide*: http://towardtheheart.com/assets/uploads/files/OD_Survival_Guide_Tips_to_Save_a_Life_2012.08.29_upright_for_website.pdf

CHECKLIST

Each event is unique, with different requirements. Checklist items may or may not be applicable to your event.

TO DO:

- If serving alcohol, obtain a Special Occasion Licence.
- Ensure required staff have a *Serving it Right* certificate.
- Work with local harm reduction organizations to provide information and other harm reduction services at the event.
- Set aside a quiet space at the event where distressed attendees can calm down.
- Contact a local organization or plan an in-house effort to promote a culture of consent around sexual activity and shared responsibility for preventing sexual violence at the event.
- Talk to your event medical team and event security providers about your harm reduction approach to alcohol and other drugs at the event.
- Let attendees know about harm reduction resources that will be available at the event.

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S HEALTH AUTHORITIES

First Nations Health Authority
<http://www.fnha.ca/>
1-866-913-0033

Island Health
<http://www.viha.ca/>
1-877-370-8699

Provincial Health Services Authority
www.phsa.ca/
604-675-7400

Fraser Health
<http://www.fraserhealth.ca/>
1-877-935-5669

Northern Health
<https://northernhealth.ca/>
250-565-2649

Interior Health
<http://www.interiorhealth.ca/>
250-862-4200

Vancouver Coastal Health
<http://www.vch.ca/>
1-866-884-0888

LEGISLATION

Liquor Control and Licensing Act

http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/00_96267_01

Public Health Act

http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/00_08028_01

Note: BC's *Public Health Act* (2008) gives the Provincial Health Officer or a medical health officer the authority to require a health authority or another official to do a "diagnostic examination" of potentially hazardous agents. Under the act, the term "diagnostic examination" includes collecting substances for examination to identify hazardous agents.

RESOURCES

Public Health Guidelines on Major Planned Events

Province of British Columbia. *Public Health Guidelines: Major Planned Events*.

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/keeping-bc-healthy-safe/pses-mpes/major-planned-events>

This site also includes the following fact sheets:

- *Fact Sheet #1: Drinking Water*
- *Fact Sheet #2: Safe Food*
- *Fact Sheet #3: Sanitation:*
- *Fact Sheet #4: Solid and Liquid Waste Management*
- *Fact Sheet #5: Harm Reduction*

Harm Reduction Policy in British Columbia

BC Centre for Disease Control. (2014). *BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services Policy and Guidelines*.

<http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/Other/BCHRSSPolicyandGuidelinesDecember2014.pdf>

BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre. *Sexual Assault Protocols and Procedures Manual*.

<http://www.bcwomens.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/sexual-assault-service-resources>

British Columbia Ministry of Health. (2005). *Harm Reduction: A British Columbia Community Guide*.

<http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2005/hrcommunityguide.pdf>

British Columbia Ministry of Health. (2006). *Following the Evidence: Preventing Harms from Substance Use in BC*.

<http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2006/followingtheevidence.pdf>

Directory of Victim Service and Violence Against Women Programs

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/bcs-criminal-justice-system/if-you-are-a-victim-of-a-crime>

Response to Alcohol- or other Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault

VictimLinkBC: A 24/7 confidential, multilingual helpline that provides immediate crisis support and referrals for victims of sexual violence and all other crimes.

<http://www.victimlinkbc.ca/>

Phone (toll-free): 1-800-563-0808

Safer Drinking

BC Partners for Addiction and Mental Health. Safer Drinking: Beer, wine and spirits.

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/factsheet/safer-drinking-beer-wine-and-spirits>

British Columbia Ministry of Justice. Information on Special Occasion Licences.

<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/lclb/apply/special/index.htm>

Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines

<http://www.ccsa.ca/Eng/topics/alcohol/drinking-guidelines/Pages/default.aspx>

Serving it Right website: <http://www.servingitright.com/>

Special Occasion Licences and Special Occasion Licences for Major Events
<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/lclb/apply/special/index.htm> and <https://solo.bcldb.com/>

World Health Organization. (2009). Preventing violence by reducing the availability and harmful use of alcohol.
http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/alcohol.pdf

Mixing Alcohol with other Psychoactive Substances

Alcohol and Caffeine: A Bad Buzz

http://educalcoool.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Energy_drinks.pdf

Alcohol and Energy Drinks: Don't Get your Kicks from this Mix!

<http://www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/CCSA-Alcohol-and-Caffeine-Fact-Sheet-Youth-2012-en.pdf>

Harm Reduction Supplies and Safer Partying Education

AIDS Network Kootenay Outreach and Support Society (ANKORS)

<http://www.ankorsvolunteer.com>

ANKORS, and UBC School of Population & Public Health. (2013) *"Start Small, Take it Easy": Results from the ANKORS Harm Reduction Survey at the 2013 Shambhala Music Festival.*

http://www.ankorsvolunteer.com/uploads/4/6/9/3/46939087/ankors_2013_shambhala_survey_report.pdf

BC Centre for Disease Control. Harm Reduction.

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/harm-reduction>

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. (June 2015) *Preventing Drug- and Alcohol-related Harms at Music Festivals in Canada.*

<http://www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/CCSA-Preventing-Alcohol-Drug-Harms-at-Music-Festivals-Summary-2015-en.pdf>

Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy. *Drug Checking Services Necessary to Prevent Youth Drug-Related Deaths.*

<http://cssdp.org/DrugCheckingBrief.pdf>

DanceSafe: Promoting Health and Safety within the Electronic Music community. <http://www.dancesafe.org/>

HealthLink BC. *Treating Opioid Overdose: B.C.'s Take Home Naloxone Program.*

<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile118.stm>. See also: <http://towardtheheart.com/naloxone/>

Here to Help: Mental Health & Substance Use Information. A Safe Night Out.

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/factsheet/a-safe-night-out>

Here to Help: Mental Health & Substance Use Information. Safe Tripping: Magic Mushrooms, LSD and other Hallucinogens.

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/factsheet/safer-tripping-magic-mushrooms-lsd-and-other-hallucinogens>

Provincial Harm Reduction Program. *Overdose Survival Guide: Tips to Save a Life.*

http://towardtheheart.com/assets/uploads/files/OD_Survival_Guide_Tips_to_Save_a_Life_2012.08.29_upright_for_website.pdf

Provincial Harm Reduction Program. Toward the Heart.

<http://towardtheheart.com/>

Trip Project: Providing health info to Toronto party people since 1995!

<http://www.trippproject.ca/trip/>