

Mountain Institution, Agassiz, British Columbia

Prison Needle Exchange Project at Mountain Institution: Federal Corrections Is Playing with Lives and Endangering Our Communities

The Union representing Federal Correctional Officers is worried following the death of an inmate after a fentanyl overdose on October 24, 2023, at Mountain Institution, a medium security federal prison located in Agassiz. The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN) is concerned that such unfortunate situations could surge if Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) goes ahead with its Prison Needle Exchange Program (PNEP).

“Providing access to needles for inmates to inject their illegal drugs alone in their cells does nothing to curb and treat addiction issues. It is dangerous for both inmates and staff. Two officers were exposed to fentanyl this week, with health consequences which could have been deadly without first aid. If the Federal Correctional Service is serious about helping inmates to turn their life around, it must set up an Overdose Prevention Site (OPS). There, inmates would have access not only to clean supplies, but more importantly to supervised health care and a pathway to recovery” says John Randle, Regional President of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers.

In September 2023, Correctional Service of Canada announced that a Prison Needle Exchange Program (PNEP) would be imposed at Mountain Institution. UCCO-SACC-CSN strongly opposes the use of PNEP and has advocated that the CSC instead deploy supervised overdose prevention sites (OPS).

In light of the British Columbia Chief Coroner’s report of March 2022 that drug use alone is a significant morbidity factor, the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers is puzzled by the decision of Correctional Service of Canada to implement PNEP. However, the union suspects that the low cost of the PNEP compared to that of an OPS is a key factor behind this poor decision.

“Federal Institutions are supposed to be the place for rehabilitation of inmates before releasing them into our communities,” says John Randle.

“But with the Prison Needle Exchange Program, Correctional Service of Canada is giving up on its mandate of releasing inmates in the community as law-abiding citizens and is instead just warehousing inmates and letting communities deal with the addiction issues later.”

British Columbia’s drug crisis is arguably the worst in Canada. Federal Corrections should be doing everything to ensure that inmates have the support needed to recover from their addiction through tools such as Overdose Prevention Site, rather than enabling them with Prison Needle Exchange Program.

For more information:

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About UCCO-SACC-CSN

The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN) represents over 7,300 members, working in Federal institutions across Canada.