

# Mayors want trial safe-injection sites

## 20 Canadian mayors back Owen's motion

By FRANCES BULA

Canada's big-city mayors have endorsed establishment of experimental safe-injection sites for drug users, to be run in cooperation with Health Canada, in four to six of the country's cities.

The 20 mayors, all attending the Federation of Canadian Municipalities big-city mayors' caucus in Ottawa, voted unanimously in favour of the motion put forward by Vancouver Mayor Philip Owen.

B.C.'s provincial health officer, Perry Kendall, who accompanied the mayor to speak in support of

the idea, said the mayors of Winnipeg, Regina and Edmonton all spoke in favour of the proposal, which stipulated that the sites would have to be part of an evaluated pilot project.

He said groups in Montreal, Quebec City, and Victoria have all been working on proposals for safe-injection sites, prompted by a concern about the level of drug addiction in their cities and the health problems it is causing, from overdose deaths to the spread of infectious diseases like AIDS and hepatitis C.

Health-care workers believe if addicts were allowed to inject their drugs at a supervised site, they could get immediate medical help if they overdosed and they would get clean needles,

instead of sharing them.

Vancouver adopted a drug strategy last year that, among many other recommendations, also supported the idea of studying the feasibility of a supervised safe-injection site.

Owen has consistently said that he won't support a safe-injection site if Vancouver is the only city with one and unless it's part of a national program with Health Canada support. Vancouver city manager Judy Rogers said the FCM resolution is a significant one.

Kendall said Health Canada has provided a grant through the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse, to assemble municipal officials interested in having experimental sites.