



## Safe-injection site a winner, says mayor: Vancouver's Campbell insists 'we've seen a positive difference'

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Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell has no doubt his city's **safe-injection** site is a winner.

"It's surpassed all expectations we had," said the former city coroner yesterday. "We've seen a [positive] difference in the number of people injecting in the street. We've seen a change in the [Downtown Eastside] street-scape. We've seen a drop [in the area] in HIV and hep C.

"Those are major changes, but they are very preliminary. I hope they [can] continue."

North America's only government-sponsored program supervising injection of illegal drugs has been operating for 20 months. **Insite** gives addicts a place to inject such street-bought drugs as heroin and cocaine without fear of being mugged in an alley by other addicts or dealers. And unlike in the mean streets around the Hastings Street site or at the West End's Dr. Peter Centre, not a single addict has died of a drug overdose at an SIS.

But Campbell also acknowledged that a supervised injection site "is not the be-all and end-all. It really is just one part of the puzzle."

"Treatment is always going to be difficult, mainly because there is no one treatment. There may be five, six, seven, who knows how many different ways of treating a disease."

Dr. David Marsh is in charge of the **safe-injection** site plan as Vancouver General Hospital medical director for HIV/AIDS and aboriginal health programs. While employing a scientist's caution, he offered stats concurring with Campbell's assessment that, so far, the three-year pilot is safer for users.

Marsh said that since opening in September 2003, over 5,000 users have injected at **Insite** at least once. And while experiencing about 300 overdoses that required nursing intervention, there have not been any on-site deaths or shooters walking out in an overdosed state.

"They don't leave the **safe-injection** site until the effects of the overdose wear off," said Marsh, president of the Canadian Society for Addiction Medicine. "So far, all the OD [overdose] incidents have been managed well."

Meanwhile, Campbell said the final stage of the fight against the hard drug scourge is about to be unveiled.

"Next month, we will be rolling out our prevention end," the mayor said, "which is probably the most difficult to put together, because it has to be so comprehensive," requiring a safe neighbourhood, employment training, jobs and recreation options.

"Then we will have all four pillars" including enforcement, harm reduction and treatment. "Then it's a matter of making sure we don't stop pushing for support on all four."

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