

# THE VANCOUVER SUN

## Islanders tour safe-needle sites: HEALTH | Victoria politicians get look at Insite, Dr. Peter Centre

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VANCOUVER | A contingent of Victoria politicians toured Vancouver's two safe-injection sites Friday in a search of answers to the Vancouver Island city's street drug problems.

Rob Fleming, Victoria-Hillside NDP MLA, Dean Fortin, city councillor, and Marianne Alto, a long-time HIV/AIDS policy developer and city council candidate, visited the Insite facility on East Hastings Street and the Dr. Peter Centre in the west end.

Both sites allow drug users to inject drugs in a supervised medical setting with clean syringes, and both refer addicts to counselling services.

The fact-finding mission comes after a summer of public forums that sparked debate on the size, shape, scope and location of a possible Victoria safe-injection site.

"Our visit advances that knowledge," Fortin said. "It was important to see how both sites involved an integration into a community, and that's going to be important no matter where and how we put it in Victoria."

Insite, which inside looks like a high-end hair salon with brushed metal, wood laminate and mood lighting, runs on a \$2-million budget.

Research by the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS suggests Insite has reduced needle sharing among some of the most high-risk drug users who suffer from HIV/AIDS. But critics say the research is far from conclusive.

While Insite focuses solely on safe injection, the Dr. Peter Centre has residential apartments where users can inject drugs, a safe injection room run by registered nurses, a daycare service and privately-funded music and massage rooms.

Both sites are two years into a three-year test period and receive partial provincial and federal funding support, which Victoria would seek as well, Fleming said.

"I was very impressed with both facilities," he said.

"What we probably need to do is to talk further with some of the agencies that deal with this problem . . . and see how we could introduce a service like this."

A Victoria solution may be "somewhere in-between" Insite and the Dr. Peter Centre, Fortin said.

The city doesn't need the high capacity of a Downtown Eastside site, nor the high budget of the Dr. Peter Centre, he said.

Victoria's next step will be developing a proposal for its own custom-designed local facility to discuss with the Vancouver Island Health Authority and the public, said Fortin.

The city's mayor, police chief, island health officer and provincial health officer have said in the past they support the idea of some sort of supervised injection site in Victoria.

Illustration:

• Photo: Darren Stone, Victoria Times Colonist / Executive director Maxine Davis (left) and nurse Stephanie Gin at Vancouver's Dr. Peter Centre.

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