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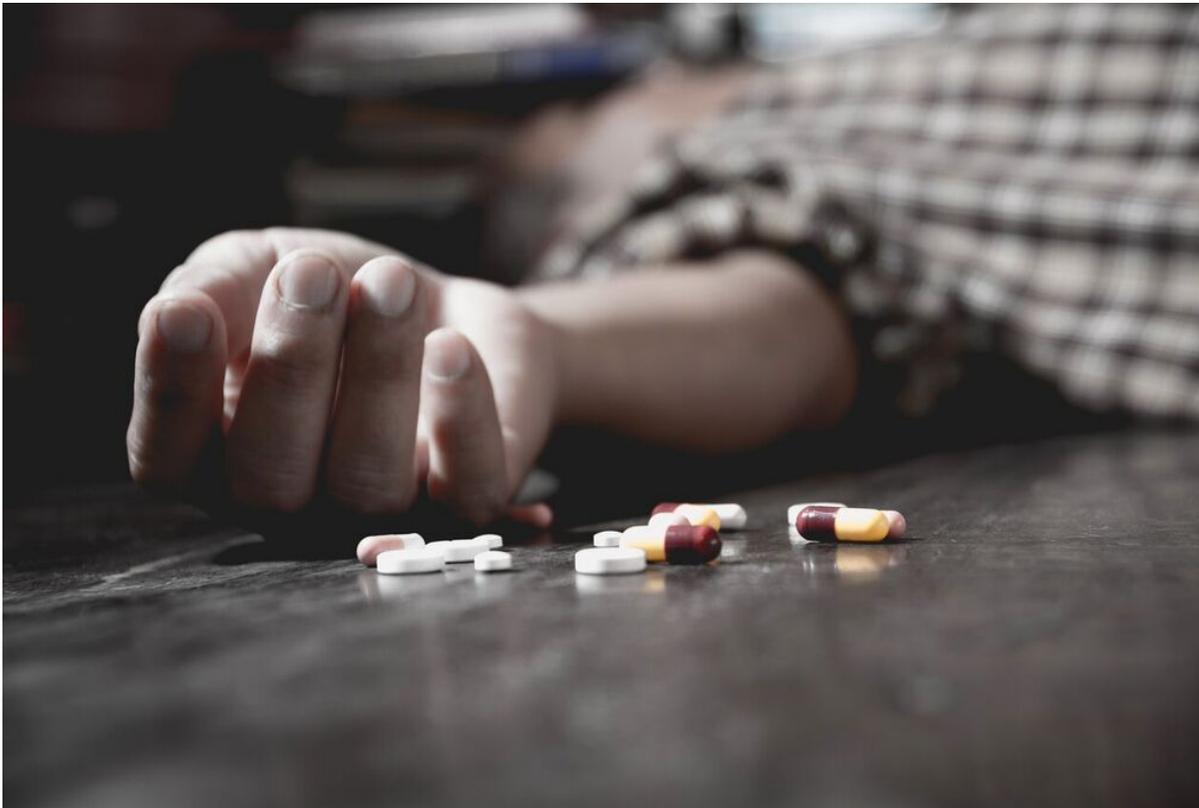
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In Print

Confronting the fentanyl crisis



Harm reduction initiatives from this summer's festival season

By Jillian McMullen, Staff Writer

New data released by the BC government shows that the number of overdose deaths in BC in July was 30 per cent higher than the number of overdose deaths in July 2016.



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That data, and other indicators, suggests that the overdose crisis in BC is becoming more severe. Charges were recently laid against an alleged drug dealer after the overdose death of a 16-year-old New Westminster this spring. The girl took “a lethal dose of MDMA” and went into distress, according to a report by *CBC News*.

The ongoing and increasingly intensifying fentanyl crisis in the Lower Mainland has generated a lot of public anxiety with regards to this popular practice among young adults and the possible threat it poses to them.

In light of the growing crisis, the *Other Press* reached out to Alex Betsos, co-founder and volunteer coordinator at Karmik, a Vancouver-based harm reduction initiative aimed at facilitating safer partying in the nightlife and festival community. Betsos said Karmik supplies harm reduction tools including drug testing, clean syringes, safe injection sites, women’s safe spaces, free condoms, and sanctuary spaces at festivals.

This year, Karmik attended numerous festivals both locally and internationally, including Centre of Gravity, Hi Society, Vancouver Pride and Bamboo Bass Festival.

“Center of Gravity was an interesting test of how integrating medical and harm reduction approaches can create a dynamic festival health space,” Betsos said. “I think the inclusion of these major events, especially Pride and Center of Gravity show how harm reduction mentality is beginning to be adopted by the general public. The Vancouver Pride Society team were very excited to work with us, and we were happy to be involved. I think our goal next year is to spread our services further into these events.”

Betsos admits that while some festivals accept the consumption of drugs at their events as an undeniable reality,

others are more reluctant to provide even basic drug information to attendees. This may be due to mainstream

attitudes surrounding drug consumption and the current abstinence-only education offered by some governments.

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However, the addition of harm reduction advocacy in British Columbia has greatly helped local initiatives.

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