



Okanagan Nation Alliance Aim to Destigmatize the Drug Overdose Epidemic with the Purple Ribbon Campaign

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tkwətniwt (Westbank), Syilx Territory: From **August 29-30, 2022**, the Syilx Okanagan Nation will host the 'Purple Ribbon Campaign Caravan' as part of our efforts to support Nation members and families facing addiction issues and promote International Overdose Awareness Day. In particular, it is a response to the urgent need to address the stigma that surrounds drug use. We must address the stigma that surrounds drug use and overdose, while simultaneously increasing culturally appropriate supports and services to decrease the violence and disruption that our communities face.

The Caravan will travel throughout Syilx Nation communities, bringing hundreds of people together, and will focus on sharing resources, promoting discussion, and offering information related to the drug and opioid crisis. Through raising awareness, the campaign supports good health and well-being and fostering positive social change.

"As Syilx People we continue to face an overdose emergency, with First Nations people five times more likely to experience an overdose throughout the Province of BC — despite being 2.6% of the population, Indigenous people make up 10% of overdose cases. These inequalities have their roots in intergenerational trauma which continue to resound throughout Indigenous communities to this day. This action, such as the Purple Ribbon Caravan provide the opportunity for us to unite as a people and move forward together" stated Jennifer Lewis, ONA Wellness Manger.

Alan Louis, ONA Syilx Okanagan Nation representatives stated that "The drug and opioid crisis continues to underscore the facts that social determinants of health are all linked to extreme poverty, economic disparity, poor health conditions, lack of accessible housing and are rooted in a history of colonization that resulted in the displacement of indigenous peoples. These complex issues require holistic comprehensive response's" adding, "we must also invest in ulturally safe harm-reduction, treatment and recovery services that address the pernicious effects of discrimination and racism."

The importance of this year's Caravan is heightened due to the deepening impacts of a multitude of crises that continue to challenge the mental health and overall well-being of all ilndigeneous people. From the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings of the 215+ at Kamloops Indian Residential School, and the devastation and disturbances created by natural disasters like wildfires and floods, our communities and members are dealing with unprecedented disruptions and trauma.

"It continues to deeply alarm me how the overdose crisis impacts our families and communities. We must come together even more to break down the stigma, reduce the fear, and shame that

keep people silent, but more so as society at large seek solutions and reduce harm within our communities,” Allan Louis, Syilx Health Representative, affirms.

It is important for anyone facing these issues to know that you are not alone, and that there are resources and supports available to see you through challenging times. For more resources visit: www.syilx.org/wellness/our-programs-and-services/purple-ribbon-campaign/

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ONA joins and recognizes Purple Ribbon Day – and all the efforts globally – that provide a deeper recognition to the issue of drug addiction and overdoses, alongside all of the victims of the current opioid emergency. Efforts like the Purple Ribbon Campaign Caravan are part of a broader range of programs and activities, including the Nation Drug Forum, that the Nation takes on to actively address the current opioid crisis that is devastating communities throughout the territory.

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