

August 23, 2024

## **‘THE BLUE HAT MEMORIAL PROJECT’ INSTALLED AT CITY HALL RECOGNIZES THE IMPACTS OF THE OPIOID CRISIS**

**This Council initiative, created by artist and City Councillor Ron Kerr, looks to spark important conversations about the tragedy that is the extreme number of deaths of men and boys during the opioid crisis in British Columbia.**

August 31 is International Overdose Awareness Day (OAD). This day helps to provide information on, stimulate discussion around, and prevent and reduce drug-related harm. Ahead of this year’s OAD, the City of Campbell River Council is installing a commemorative art installation titled ‘The Blue Hat Memorial Project’ on the lawn at City Hall. This installation will remain in place from August 26 to August 31, 2024.

The display will include 12,000 blue flags, which represent the current number of unregulated drug deaths of men and boys in B.C. since the beginning of the opioid crisis in 2016 (according to the BC Coroners Service). This represents 80 per cent of the more than 15,000 total deaths in B.C.

A separate memorial will also acknowledge the 189 women and men in Campbell River who have lost their lives due to the opioid crisis since 2016. They will be represented by purple and white flags.

*“Every life lost to the opioid crisis is a tragedy and we as a Council will continue to do what we can to get the support our community needs to address this crisis head-on,”* says Mayor Kermit Dahl. *“Council has made a healthy and safe community a priority and in support of this, we delivered temporary housing units with support services to the community, opened countless warming centres on the coldest nights of the year, and have contributed City-owned land toward the construction of second stage housing and treatment facilities. The Blue Hat Memorial Project furthers this work by continuing the conversation and reminding us of the work we still must do.”*

Council will be on site at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, August 27, 2024, and invite the public to attend the official opening of the art installation.

Installation of this initiative is funded through donations from community organizations.

*“I brought the Blue Hat initiative forward for Council’s consideration as it acknowledges the challenges that the community is facing and supports my work with men’s mental health,”* says Councillor Ron Kerr. *“The display highlights that most overdose deaths in B.C. have been males and that a significant number are tied to the trades and industry. The blue hard hat honours these men and acknowledges the impact that this has had on our work force. I hope that when everyone sees the art installation, it sparks conversations around the current men’s health crisis, and all those who have lost their lives, and moves people to demand more supports for treatment and recovery services, as Council continues to do.”*

A healthy and safe community is a priority of Council and several City initiatives have been launched in recent months in support of this priority:

- The City is working with the Province, through BC Housing, to build new temporary housing units with support services at 1299 Homewood Road.
- The City is partnering with the Canadian Centre for Safer Communities to develop a comprehensive Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, to collaboratively create a vision and actionable plan that enhances safety, sense of safety, and overall well-being within the community.
- Council contributed City-owned land toward the construction of second stage housing and treatment facilities.
- Council continues to advocate to other levels of government and call for investment in treatment facilities and transition housing, such as Turning Point and Second Chance Recovery House, from other levels of government.

For more information on what the City is doing to foster a healthy and safe community, visit [www.campbellriver.ca/downtown-safety](http://www.campbellriver.ca/downtown-safety).

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