

National “Secure City” Award recognizes City of Vancouver’s Four Pillar Drug Strategy

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Toronto, Ontario – Vancouver is one of Canada’s most “secure cities” according to the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) which will give the City of Vancouver the 2009 Secure City Award June 5 at its annual Urban Leadership Awards (ULA’s) in Toronto.

“It was Vancouver’s leadership in creating, and continuing, to support the “Four Pillar Approach to Drug Problems in Vancouver”, first launched in 2000, that drew the attention of this year’s award judges. The City of Vancouver program advocates prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement as four pillars in addressing drug addiction in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside”, said CUI President and CEO Glen Murray

“Vancouver’s citizens have to be applauded for continuing to put mayors and councillors in office who support this program. In Vancouver today if you don’t support the Four Pillars program, it’s pretty hard to get elected. The message is that Vancouver citizens have moved beyond the easy rhetoric that people who use drugs should be in jail, and recognize instead that drug addiction on their streets is a civic issue that deserves a broader approach,” said Murray.

About 500 elite members of Canada’s who’s who of city building will gather in Toronto on June 5 at the Royal York Hotel to honour the City of Vancouver’s Four Pillar Approach (<http://vancouver.ca/fourpillars/>) and 17 other groups and individuals (www.canurb.com/awards/ula/leadershipawards2009.php) across the country that are making Canadian cities exciting and dynamic places to live and work.

For Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson, this award confirms what Vancouver citizens have known for a long time. “This approach to dealing with drug addiction has successfully shifted public perception about drug use from a criminal issue to an issue of community and public health”, said Mayor Robertson. “A health and justice system that fully supports all four pillars is the only way we’ll be able to break the cycle of addiction in our city and across the country. I am pleased that other cities across the country are adopting a Four Pillars approach as a smart solution to a serious problem.”

For Donald MacPherson who coordinates the program this award may convince other cities to act. “Every city on the planet has a 24-7 illegal drug delivery system. This is a reality that cities have to face and the traditional ways to face these things are not working. Cities often defer to other authorities on this subject because they don’t see it as “their” problem. What’s compelling about Vancouver is that we maintain that cities need to advocate strongly for dealing with drug issue – that includes health and policing – in a comprehensive way. This award tells other municipalities that they can also take ownership of this issue and play a strong leadership role,” said MacPherson.

The Urban Leadership Awards (ULA) Program honours Canadian individuals, groups and organizations that have made significant contributions to improving the quality of life in Canada’s cities and urban regions. The 2009 ULA’s have been made possible by the generous support of a variety of corporate sponsors including Gold Sponsors - Loblaw Properties Ltd., Scotiabank, TD Bank Financial Group, the Ontario Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, Environics, the City of Toronto, GE Canada and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). Community Builder Sponsors include Toronto Hydro, Local 27 of the Union of Carpenters and Allied Workers, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Great West Life, London Life and Canada Life Assurance Companies.

The judges for this year’s awards included Canadians who have dedicated their lives to public service and who have detailed knowledge of the local stories and triumphs of Canadians in their home communities. Under the chairmanship of the Hon. David Crombie, the committee included; Al Duerr, former Mayor of Calgary; Newfoundland’s Dr. Linda Inkpen; Dr. Antonia Maioni, Director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada; John Kim Bell, founder of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation; Ms. Mitzie Hunter, a Vice President at Goodwill Industries; and, Dr. Nola Kate Seymoar, President and CEO, International Centre for Sustainable Cities, based in British Columbia.

The Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in urban areas across Canada and throughout the world.

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Some Facts about the Four Pillar approach to drug problems in Vancouver

- Mayor Phillip Owen released the Framework for Action – A Four Pillar Approach to Drug Problems in Vancouver in 2000. The four pillars are prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement (first developed in Germany and Switzerland)
- The approach deals with drug addiction and shifts the public perception about drug use from being a criminal issue to an issue of community and personal health
- It incorporates policies, actions and initiatives that are effectively managing risks to public safety and contributing to the personal security and well-being of the citizens of Vancouver
- Prior to adopting program, the City created a Four Pillars Coalition including business, government, non-profit and advocacy to engage wider community in addressing the city's drug crime problems .The coalition now includes over 60 organizations dedicated to ensuring the Four Pillars implementation.
- Partnerships with federal, provincial and municipal governments forged The Vancouver Agreement which provides initiatives that are essential components of strategy implementation. The City of Vancouver provides leadership and coordination of the implementation programs with other initiatives delivered in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health and the Vancouver Police Department.
- Highlighted achievements include:
 - 2003 opening of North America's first supervised injection site
 - 2003 Vancouver Police conduct huge operation to dismantle the open drug scene in the downtown Eastside
 - 2005 introduction of North American Opiate Medications Initiative (NAOMI), a clinical experiment of heroin assisted treatment to study and explore ways to improve efficacy of treatment for heroin addiction using prescribed heroin in comparison with methadone treatment.
 - Addiction services have expanded to all areas of the city outside of the Downtown Eastside
 - Social and economic development initiatives have been initiated through the Vancouver Agreement to address the prevention aspect of Four Pillar program.
 - Decreased numbers of drug users using the street.
 - Dramatic drop in the number of deaths due to drug overdoses.
- Vancouver's Four Pillars strategy has been inspiration and model for other Canadian cities, e.g. Toronto, Ottawa, London, Regina, Edmonton, Red Deer, Victoria, and Kelowna.