



VICTORIA MOBILE HEALTH CLINIC REPORT 2018-2021



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A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Proximity work with marginalized and disaffiliated groups and individuals who are excluded from healthcare is at the heart of Doctors of the World Canada's mission and our movement's actions internationally. To ensure that our professionals have the appropriate resources for outreach work, our international network has deployed mobile units in crisis situations for nearly 40 years. These units provide safe spaces where a trust-based relationship of care can be established. Their mobility, alongside a harm reduction approach and services offered with openness and non-judgement, help break down many barriers to accessing health care. In Canada, this model has also proven to be effective and has become a catalyst for social transformation in Montreal since 2014. Based on this experience, Doctors of the World Canada was pleased to share this approach with community organizations and institutions in Victoria, working locally to serve to those experiencing exclusion and social precarity.



Barriers to accessing health care create inequities which disproportionately harm the most vulnerable groups. As a medical specialist in public health, I can attest to the importance of not only providing care as an emergency response, but of also targeting the many determinants of health with the goal of creating lasting solutions to complex problems. We are pleased that the Victoria Cool Aid Society has agreed to take over our programme and shares this commitment to providing an urgent health response to both acute and chronic social crises while also working towards greater social transformation. This offers an innovative response to current health and social issues and we are confident that their leadership will honour the principles of social justice and universal rights to health that define the Doctors of the World Canada mobile unit approach.

Dr. David-Martin Milot, President
Public Health and Preventive Medicine Specialist



MISSION AND VISION

Mission

Doctors of the World is an international movement of volunteers working at the national and international levels. Through innovative medical programs and evidence-based advocacy, Doctors of the World empowers excluded people and communities to take action and demand their right to health while fighting for universal access to care.

Vision

A world in which access to health barriers have disappeared, a world in which health is recognized as a fundamental right.

DOCTORS OF THE WORLD'S MOBILE HEALTH CLINIC

Since 2018, Doctors of the World's Mobile Health Clinic, powered by TELUS Health, has been operating in Victoria, British Columbia (BC), providing primary health care services to our most marginalized community members.

Our team, staffed by a Registered Nurse, a Logistic and Volunteer Manager and supported by outreach workers and volunteers, travels Greater Victoria, including Sidney and Sooke, offering primary health care to people in need where they are: in parks, in shelters, on the streets...

Onboard services include:

- Wound care
- STI testing
- Over-the-counter medications
- Harm reduction supplies (condoms, safer injection and inhalation materials)
- Contraceptives and more...





CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Doctors of the World is privileged to have operated on the unceded territories of the Songhees, Esquimalt, T'sou-ke, Tsartlip, W̱SÁNEĆ, and Tsawout nations' people and ancestors between April 2018 and March 2021.

In April 2016, the British Columbia Official Health Officer declared a public health emergency, due to the rise in drug overdoses and related deaths. The resulting shortage of healthcare professionals, coupled with a housing crisis, meant that marginalized groups in cities like Victoria faced even greater challenges when trying to access the public health system. Doctors of the World Canada's second Mobile Health Clinic was launched in 2018 as part of our commitment to addressing these issues.

In deploying the Mobile Health Clinic in Victoria, Doctors of the World relied on learnings from 20 years of mobile clinic practice in Montreal, extensive experience in outreach work and harm reduction across the globe, as well as the results of a needs assessment conducted in September 2016. The needs assessment included consults with focus groups of community organizations, municipal authorities, people experiencing homelessness and/or suffering from substance use-related issues, as well

as sex workers. This assessment made it possible to identify an urgent need for support and health services and highlighted the lack of culturally and ethnically sensitive care provided in the public health system. The cost, access to transport, immigration status or lack of identification, and experiences of stigma were all identified as significant barriers to reaching out for services, specifically for the following groups:

- People suffering from substance use-related issues
- People experiencing homelessness
- Members of the Indigenous community
- Sex workers

To address these concerning results, the Mobile Health Clinic was deployed to Victoria in April 2018, with the intention to hand leadership of the program over to a local community organization after three years of operation. Since then, the Clinic van has travelled throughout Greater Victoria, including Sidney and Sooke, offering primary health care (in collaboration with community partners) to people in need, where they need it most, including in parks, shelters, and on the street.

Today, the province is struggling with a dual health crisis: the opioid overdose emergency (since 2016) and the COVID-19 pandemic (since Spring 2020). The ongoing housing shortages mean that many people (including families) still cannot afford adequate lodging, a situation that amplifies the current dual crisis. Recent statistics indicate that 1,716 people died in 2020 due to illicit drug use in BC, the worst year yet for fatal overdoses.





APPROACH

Since 2014 in Montreal, and since 2018 in Victoria, Doctors of the World's Mobile Clinic program has reached out to people experiencing homelessness on the streets, in parks, and in shelters. Inside the Clinic, nurses build relationships, care for people in need, and listen to them without judgement - safely and privately. This approach also makes it possible to establish a relationship between these individuals and the public health system, and even, in some cases, to reconnect them with public health care services.



MOBILISING THE COMMUNITY

Engaging volunteers from the larger community as well as healthcare professionals is at the heart of Doctors of the World's mission and is a core feature of our intervention model. The aim is to increase their awareness of the challenges faced by marginalized people in their local community. In addition, volunteers help spread the word about Doctors of the World's services and they support our healthcare professionals by greeting and sharing information with Mobile Health Clinic users.

Objectives

The goal of Doctors of the World's Mobile Health Clinic is to ensure access to health services for those who are excluded from the health system due to a care approach that is not adapted to their reality.

More specifically, the Mobile Health Clinic aims to:

- 1) provide care for those who are not connected to health services;
- 2) create a bridge to connect people to the healthcare system;
- 3) create partnerships with community agencies and institutions to help support their programs and clients;
- 4) create opportunities for interaction between health providers and marginalized populations;
- 5) change attitudes favorably towards disenfranchised and/or marginalized populations.



When I was in the tent city, they [the Clinic] would come and visit us... I come to pick up vitamins, ask questions, you know general health... I love coming here. You really seem to show up in the places where you're needed... it's totally convenient, it's everywhere."

- Clinic patient



“I felt the mandates of Doctors of the World’s Mobile Health Clinic resonate with my values and beliefs. What I love about my work is partnering with different community organizations and volunteers, immersing myself in the community with my role as a nurse, and building and developing consistent relationships with community members and clients. I also love providing resources that other organizations do not have, therefore meeting a gap in needs in the community. I am an activist, researcher, and community partner, caretaker, and advocate, and I believe that Doctors of the World has helped me to expand my role in Victoria’s marginalized and unhoused population and street community.”

- Olvie Li, casual nurse,
Victoria, BC - Doctors of
the World Canada



VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Over the years, volunteers have come to play an essential role aboard the Clinic and their positive contribution to the service cannot be overstated. The Victoria staff team has invested significant time and energy into building a strong and dynamic volunteering program through initiatives such as volunteer information sessions, advertisements, and volunteer recognition events.

Before COVID-19 took hold, a group of approximately 30 volunteers were supporting our activities. The pandemic forced Doctors of the World to pause the volunteer program for about three months in Spring 2020. As soon as we were able to safely reintegrate volunteers, 15 of them returned to the field with us in June 2020. A select group of volunteers performed modified roles once completing additional training, in adherence with updated protocols and procedures. Volunteer

hours were not tracked during the first year of operations, but in the subsequent two years - from April 2019 to March 2021 - they generously contributed 419 hours of volunteer time.

« I started volunteering with Doctors of the World because a “tent city” popped up in my neighbourhood and I wanted to understand this community better. Volunteering has given me the opportunity to learn how to empathize with vulnerable individuals and to be able to assist them with their medical and emotional needs. »

- Leah, Mobile Health Clinic volunteer

Partnerships

The contribution of community partners is a vital component of Doctors of the World's intervention model. Over the years, Doctors of the World in Victoria has partnered with numerous local organizations and associations to deliver services and coordinate responses, as well as to share knowledge and resources. Our group of established collaborators and partners include:

- Aid Vancouver Island**
- Anawim House**
- City of Victoria**
- Cool Aid Society**
- Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness**
- Indigenous harm reduction team**
- Our Place Society**
- Out of the Rain Youth Shelter**
- Peers**
- Poverty Kills**
- Saanich Food Bank**
- Society of Saint Vincent de Paul**
- Sooke Shelter**
- Sooke Food Bank**
- SOLID**
- South Island Communicable Disease Program**
- The Mustard Seed**
- The Soup Kitchen**
- Victoria Native Friendship Centre**
- Vancouver Island Health Authority**



“Doctors of the World have been an excellent partner to the Victoria Rainbow Kitchen Society, assisting anyone in need by providing essential services and attention [...] guests, staff and volunteers of the Victoria Rainbow Kitchen Society are immensely grateful for the services that Doctors of the World are able to offer each week, and thankful for the time and care these amazing front-line workers provide.”

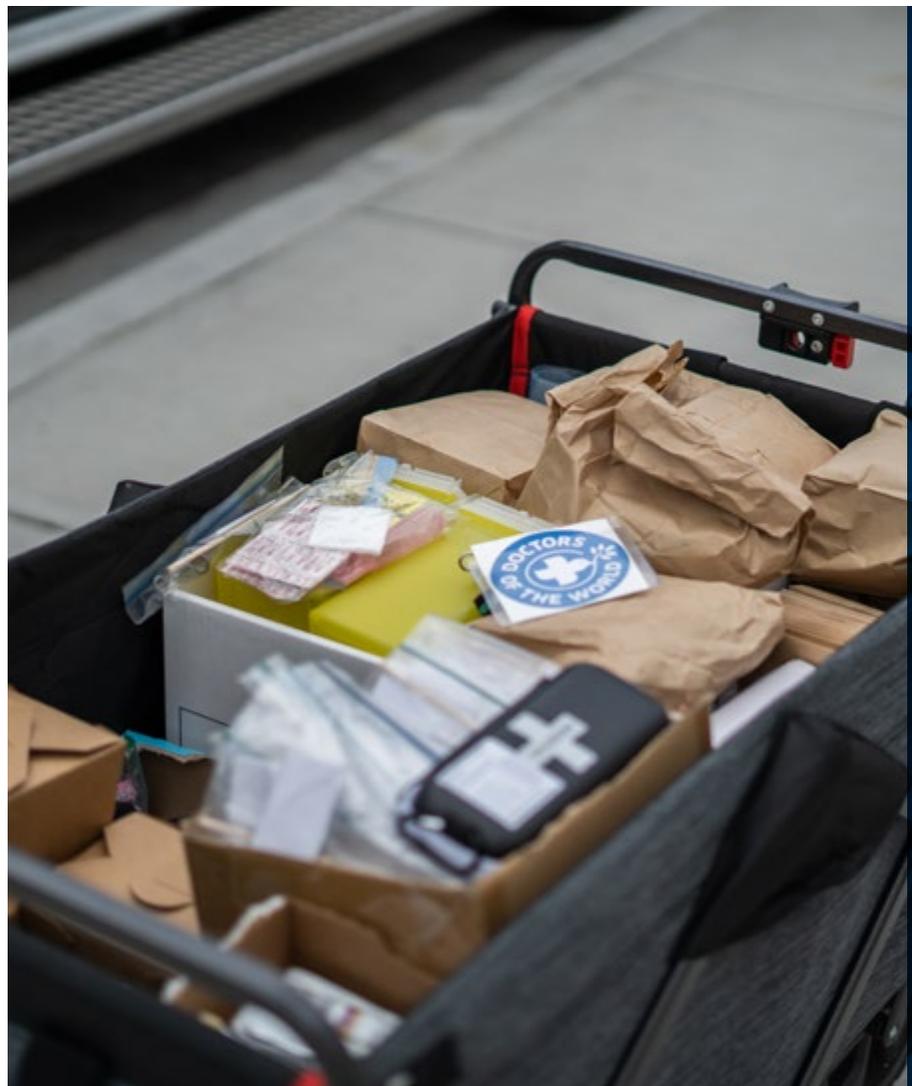
– Patrick Johnstone, Director,
Victoria Rainbow Kitchen Society

“Doctors of the World helps solidify the harm reduction and compassion services that we offer. At AVI Health Center we saw the gaps in care for those accessing services in Sooke. Doctors of the World was the perfect organization to help support us at the Sooke Food Bank every 2 weeks. Another much needed service to have nurses on site to the community’s most vulnerable populations. Doctors of the World has helped connect folks with services that would otherwise have to wait major times to see doctors, especially now during these times of pandemic. We are beyond thrilled to have the support and the clients we serve are beyond grateful to have additional health services come to them in Sooke.”

- Member of Vancouver Island Health Authority

Focus on harm reduction

Harm reduction has also been at the heart of Doctors of the World’s approach in Victoria. Our mission has always focused on creating positive change and offering care without judgement. Since 2018, we have provided numerous harm reduction supplies to the population we serve, including materials for safe drug use practices and safe sexual practices. In the last 18 months of the program, an average of 42% of interventions included the distribution of harm reduction supplies.



RESULTS

Our program has allowed Victoria's marginalized populations to access primary health care in a safe and private environment, including services such as STI testing, wound care, and influenza and COVID-19 vaccination. We also provided references to other health care and community services, access to numerous supplies including Naloxone kits, over-the-counter medications, and harm reduction supplies.

In **26 months** of operations in Victoria, Doctors of the World made **562 clinic outings** and carried out **6,183 patient interventions**.

« Our Communicable Disease Street outreach program is always looking to build community engagement and capacity in populations that are underserved with the goal of preventing, treating, and screening for communicable infections. Our partnership with Doctors of the World and the mobile van has allowed us to expand our horizons beyond the bricks and mortar buildings where we often provide testing and treatment.»

- Wendy Stark, RN,
Clinical Coordinator,
South Island Communicable
Disease Program





LOCATIONS

Outing locations are determined in collaboration with local organizations and service providers and are based on identified needs and gaps in health care access. They have consequently changed over the course of the past three years as needs evolved. Outing locations have included:

Food Banks - such as the Mustard Seed, the Soup Kitchen, Sooke Food Bank, Saanich Peninsula food bank and the Rainbow Kitchen

Shelters – such as Our Place, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Out of the Rain Youth Shelter, Sooke Shelter

Parks - such as Beacon Hill Park, Topaz Park, Gorge Park, Strathcona park, Centennial Square and more

In 2019, outing locations were expanded to Sidney and Sooke and Doctors of the World became the only service to cover the entire Greater Victoria area.

“The Saanich Peninsula Lions Food Bank originally started collaborating with Doctors of the World after we had reached out to Alana Jackson for more information about the program. Quickly we both came to the conclusion that Doctors of the World would be extremely beneficial to not only our clients but our community. It wasn’t long before the Doctors of the World van was at our food bank twice a month [...] The Doctors of the World Mobile Health Clinic has brought a much-needed resource to our community.”

- Tyson Elder, Saanich Peninsula Lions Food Bank

COVID-19

Impact in the community

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on the population served by Doctors of the World. In the first weeks, many services closed or significantly reduced their hours of operations, which made it difficult for the community we serve to have their basic needs met, including access to bathrooms, showers, and community food programs.

The pandemic is also directly linked to a spike in overdose events and deaths due to a combination of factors. Drug toxicity increased, access to overdose prevention services (OPS) was interrupted, and calls for physical distancing and self-isolation led to more people using alone which increases the risk of fatal overdoses. The persistence of the housing crisis meant that many people

could not comply with at-home confinement measures, affecting an estimated 300 people who continue to live in parks and on the streets. Substance use and its impacts thus remain a major concern, in tandem with the clear and increasing systemic oppression and stigmatization of people struggling with substance use-related issues in the pandemic context.





“Leave nobody behind. People experiencing homelessness have been facing huge barriers since well before the COVID-19 pandemic began – housing being a major one. Over a thousand people are estimated to be unsheltered in the Greater Victoria area at this time. There is not enough housing for everyone and temporary shelters are not suitable for every individual. The situation is dire with many basic needs still not being met. People are being pushed out into other parks and areas making it harder for us to reach them. We continue to work every day to offer access to health care to our most marginalized community members experiencing homelessness, to play our part in leaving nobody behind.”

- Lynette, Nurse Program Coordinator,
Victoria - Doctors of the World Canada.

Impact on operations

The Mobile Clinic service was immediately adapted, and further modifications were made over time as the situation evolved, in order to adhere to the Public Health directives and best practices for protecting our staff, volunteers, and the community members we serve.

In the early stages of the pandemic, a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the inability to maintain physical distancing of 2 meters meant that care and services could not be provided inside the van. Once sufficient PPE was available, some care was provided within the van under certain circumstances and following strict screening and cleaning protocols. Supplies were packed into kit form for distribution (e.g. wound care kits, hand washing kits, hygiene kits). A trolley was purchased which allowed nurses to provide care and distribute supplies from tent to tent, making our service delivery model more mobile than ever before.

Doctors of the World is proud of its response to the pandemic. It was confirmation of the team's ability, on display throughout our three years in Victoria, to improve and adapt the front-line services we offer to better respond to the evolving realities and needs of those we serve and of those we work alongside.

Vaccination

During the month of March 2021, Doctors of the World agreed to assist local health authorities in Victoria with the COVID-19 vaccination campaign. We partnered with Island Health in delivering vaccines at three outing locations: The Mustard Seed, Sooke Food Bank, as well as Sooke Shelter.



CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

At the end of 2020, Doctors of the World conducted an impact evaluation of the Mobile Health Clinic. Conclusions drawn from the report indicate that the program is greatly needed and that the team has been successful in developing very efficient partnerships in the field and delivering health care services to an even larger population of excluded people than initially expected. As planned at the outset, the Mobile Health Clinic operation will be transferred to a trusted local partner.

In January 2021, Doctors of the World began the transition process, with the goal of ensuring a minimal service disruption for our clients. The first step was an open Request-for-Proposals (RFP), where many local partners and organizations were invited to apply. A committee was then appointed to review the applications and choose the partner who best met the following criteria, which were pre-established by Doctors of the World:

- 1) Organization must be non-for-profit.
- 2) Must demonstrate the capacity to operate a vehicle-based health clinic, for disenfranchised and/or marginalized populations.
- 3) Must have the capacity to provide primary and preventative health care.
- 4) Must demonstrate a similar mandate and principles congruent with those of Doctors of the World.
- 5) Demonstrated capacity to provide Medical Director oversight would be an asset.

After the RFP and review process, Victoria Cool Aid Society (Cool Aid) was chosen to lead the Mobile Clinic operations going forward. Doctors of the World is convinced that this well-established organization has the expertise and capacity to provide primary and preventive health care to people experiencing marginalization and homelessness and offer a non-stigmatizing and trauma-informed approach to care. Their community health centre, the Cool Aid Mobile Inner-City Outreach (CAMICO) team, and their multidisciplinary health team combine to make Cool Aid a key participant in the Primary Care Network in British Columbia.

MANY THANKS TO OUR FINANCIAL PARTNERS!



Media

Médecins du Monde inaugure une clinique mobile de soins de santé à Victoria, Boulevard du Pacifique, Radio-Canada, 11 juillet 2018



Telus partners with Doctors of the World to launch “Health for Good” program in Victoria, BC Mobile Syrup, July 11, 2018



Mobile clinic gets health care to the streets, Times Colonist, July 12, 2018



How mobile health clinics are transforming health care for vulnerable Canadians, National post, 27 septembre 2018



Une clinique mobile au service des sans-abris à Victoria, Reportage ICI Colombie-Britannique, 6 février 2019



Doctors of the World, Bringing Health to Marginalized Communities, Seaside Magazine February 2020



Listening to vulnerable clients, UVic anthropologists respond to community need during pandemic, UVic News, University of Victoria, April 7, 2021





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