



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Women's organizations denounce VPD spin on arrest outside women's center; renew calls for real safety in face of increasing gender-based violence

(X̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), S̱ḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish) and sə̱lilw̱ətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C – Women's organizations in the Downtown Eastside renew calls for community-led safety following an arrest made outside the Downtown Eastside Women's Center.

The calls for action come after the Vancouver Police Department sent a [press release](#) on January 17, sharing details of an arrest made near the Women's Center where a man wielding a knife attempted to enter.

"It was our staff's quick actions, experience, and training, not police action, that kept women safe from any potential harm, and we reject the VPD attempting to turn this into a media opportunity to look like heroes" said Executive Director of the Downtown Eastside Women's Center, Alice Kendall. "In their own press release, the VPD acknowledge that the man had already dropped the knife and walked away".

Women's organizations in the DTES continue to see sexualized and gender-based violence daily. Women and front-line staff respond and deal with, aggressive and violent predators and incidents that often remain unreported. When police say, "many violent crimes go unreported in the Downtown Eastside," this is a painfully long-standing and well-known fact to women and women's organizations. Fear of further retaliation, or of repercussion due to engagement in criminalized and stigmatized activities such as sex work or drug use, is real and extremely harmful.

The VPD's press release is particularly egregious given that every day we witness how current policing practices, such as coordinated street sweeps, do not contribute to women's safety and just waste municipal resources. "We also witness how ongoing disappearances and reports of missing women, particularly Indigenous women and girls, muster grossly inadequate responses from the VPD and RCMP. Despite a provincial inquiry and a national inquiry into the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, trans and two-spirit people, there is no recognizable change in policing practices nor adequate supports for communities and families who are searching for their loved ones." further states Kendall.

The Downtown Eastside Women's Center, along with the WISH Drop-In Centre Society, Battered Women's Support Services, and Atira Women's Resource Society, are renewing calls for a community-led coordinated response. [One year after expressing outrage](#) of the

ongoing sexualized and gender-based violence in the neighbourhood and no discernible outcome, we are once again calling on all levels of government for an action plan.

Access to safe spaces has been significantly reduced during the pandemic, with many spaces remaining closed or operating at reduced capacity. This is exacerbating the already existing, overlapping crises of homelessness, a deadly drug supply, worsening health conditions, lack of access to basic needs, and increased gender-based violence.

While there are multiple reports and recommendations, what continues to be absent is a coordinated and robust response to a shadow pandemic that pre-existed COVID: gender-based violence in the Downtown Eastside.

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