

WAKE UP YOUR MORTGAGE
5.24% | 5-year fixed rate*
ING DIRECT
1-877 WAKE IT UP

*Interest is calculated semi-annually and not in advance.



JEFF HODSON/METRO VANCOUVER

Phoenix Beck, 23, a former crystal meth addict, said she successfully used a substitution medication to help treat the side effects of withdrawal. Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan yesterday announced plans for a program that helps addicts by substituting prescription medication for illegal street drugs.

Drug plan launched

Initiative would let addicts substitute legal drugs for illegal ones



Mayor Sam Sullivan wants to help drug users end their addiction by offering prescription medication in the place of illicit street drugs, the mayor announced yesterday.

Sullivan hopes the program, known as Chronic Addiction Substitution Treatment (CAST), would provide a legal prescription substitute for crack, heroin or crystal meth addicts in the Downtown Eastside.

The goal of the program is to stabilize an addict's lifestyle, keeping

them from crime and perhaps providing a path to sobriety.

Before the clinical trial can proceed, it must first be approved by Health Canada. Sullivan envisions that 600 to 700 people could take part in the clinical trial, which is expected to commence in the fall.

Valery Coles, the mother of a recovering drug addict who credits methadone treatment for saving his life, said she was thrilled with the proposed trial.

"(Addiction) is a disease," Coles said. "Having lived with it for seven years I know it is a disease and it belongs in the stream of medicine and not moral conviction."

For Phoenix Beck, who began smoking crystal meth at 15, substitution drugs were a way out once she had decided to quit using.

Beck, who is now 23 and works for a renewable energy corpora-

agents of change

► Inner Change, a non-profit society, has been tasked with fundraising for CAST and developing the Health Canada proposal for the clinical trial.

► The society, whose directors include former Tory MP John Reynolds and former NDP deputy premier Joy MacPhail, will also run the trial once it is underway.

tion, said it took her roughly a year to quit.

She used Adderall, a stimulant used to treat attention-deficit disorder, to treat the side effects of withdrawal — fatigue and irritability.

"The last few times I used, which was over a year and a half ago, it ruined my day," Beck said. "It was awful. I hate the feeling of it now."

Dr. David Marsh, the physician leader for addiction medicine with Vancouver Coastal, said that while methadone is by far the most studied and successful addiction treat-

ment option, there have been a number of smaller trials over the past 15 years for stimulants like crack and crystal meth.

"All of the trials that have been done with oral stimulants have shown some positive impact," Marsh said. "Unfortunately it's not just about the medication. It's about medication combined with counselling and other services."

what do you think?

► Let us know by e-mailing us at vancouverletters@metronews.ca