

Evaluation Report

Pacific Summit on Drug User Health June 12-14, 2009

July 2009

Andrea Krüsi, MSc PPH
Thomas Kerr, PhD



British Columbia
Centre *for* Excellence
in HIV/AIDS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

The Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) organized the first Pacific Summit on Drug User Health in response to calls from people who use(d) illicit drugs in British Columbia (BC) and the Yukon and who want to advocate for better health of drug users in their local areas. The intent of the three day Summit was to share information about drug user health in BC and the Yukon, to discuss successful strategies for advocacy for drug user health and to form a province-wide network of drug users.

Participant Profile:

- 97 participants registered for the first Pacific Summit on Drug User Health
- 66 (68.0%) participants completed the evaluation survey and 6 participated in semi-structured interviews
- 29 (43.9%) survey participants were women, 36 (54.5%) were men and one was transgendered
- The ethnicity of survey participants was primarily Caucasian (39, 59.1%) and Aboriginal or Metis (20, 30.3%)
- The majority of survey participants (49, 74.3%) were between forty and fifty-nine years old
- 28 (42.4%) survey participants were daily users of illicit drugs (other than cannabis), 22 (33.3%) were intermittent users, 12 (18.2%) were former users
- Among current and former users, the average number of years of drug use was 24 years

Participants reported that:

- the Summit provided a unique platform to discuss relevant issues impacting drug users' health
- the information on drug user health presented by current and former drug users was more accessible and relevant than mainstream prevention messages
- they had learned about strategies to successfully advocate for interventions and initiatives to improve the health of drug users in their area
- a province-wide drug user network increases the bargaining power of drug users regarding initiatives and interventions that impact their health and quality of life
- they are confident that the formed association of drug users will grow to become sustained province-wide network of drug users.

INTRODUCTION:

In response to calls from people who use(d) illicit drugs in British Columbia (BC) and the Yukon and who want to form a sustained drug user network to advocate for better health of drug users in their local area, the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) organized the first Pacific Summit on Drug User Health from June 12th to 14th, 2009 in Vancouver.

The objectives of the Summit were:

- 1) To provide a forum to share recent research and information pertaining to drug user health in British Columbia and the Yukon, where drug user expertise is first and foremost on the agenda.
- 2) To share successful strategies for action on the issue of drug user health in British Columbia and the Yukon.
- 3) To promote and build networks of people who use(d) illicit drugs in order to facilitate the development of an action strategy and plan.
- 4) To share information gathered throughout the Summit as widely as possible.

In the following evaluation report we report on the extent to which Summit participants felt the objectives of the event were fulfilled.

EVALUATION METHODS:

To evaluate whether the objectives of the Pacific Summit on Drug User Health were met, we asked participants to fill out a brief survey on the last day of the Summit. Additionally, we contacted six randomly selected Summit participants representing each BC Health Authority (Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Fraser Health Authority, Northern and Interior Health Authorities) and the Yukon to participate in a qualitative interview in the week following the Summit.

Survey

At the end of the Summit, prior to the closing ceremony, we handed out a brief evaluation survey (see Appendix A) to elicit information regarding participant characteristics and participants' experiences and opinions of the drug user Summit. The

survey consisted of 15 close-ended and one open-ended question regarding the content and format of the conference. Participants were invited to self-administer the survey and, if needed, they were offered assistance by an on-site interviewer.

Semi-structured interviews

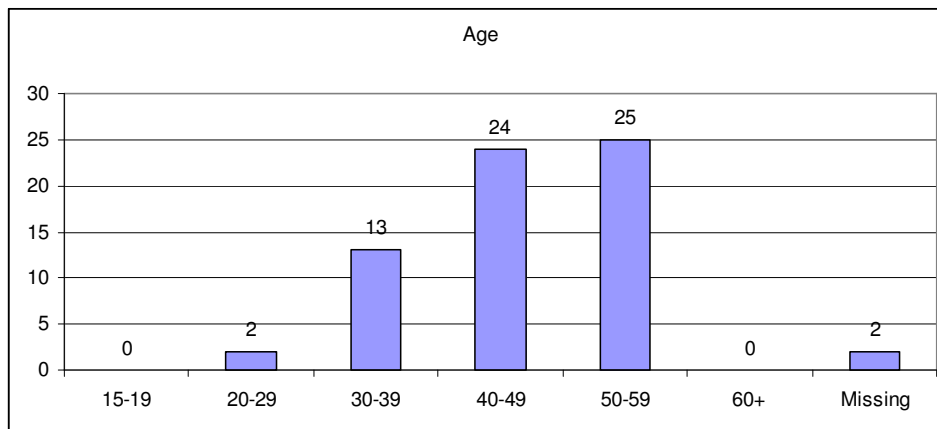
In addition to the survey, we also conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with a quasi-randomly selected sample of conference participants from each of the five BC Health Authorities and a participant from the Yukon. The semi-structured interviews complement the survey results by allowing conference participants to voice their views and opinions in a more open format. The semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B) was designed to elicit information concerning participants' expectations and experiences of the Summit, the content and the format of the conference, as well as participants' perceived progress in establishing a sustained province-wide drug user network. All interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes and were conducted over the phone, with the exception of the interview with the participant from the Vancouver Coastal Health region, which was conducted in person. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed.

RESULTS:

Participant profile:

A total of 97 participants (excluding volunteers and staff members) registered for the first Pacific Summit on Drug User Health. In total, 66 participants completed the evaluation survey, 29 (43.9%) survey participants were women, one participant self-identified as transgendered and the remaining 36 (54.5%) participants were men. As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority 49 (74.3%) of participants were aged between forty and fifty-nine.

Figure 1: Participants' age categories



A total of 39 (59.1%) participants were Caucasian and 20 (30.3%) were Aboriginal or Metis (see Figure 2 for full breakdown). As depicted in Figure 3, 20 (30.3%) of survey participants reside in the Vancouver Coastal Health Region, 16 (24.2%) visited from the Vancouver Island Health Authority, 15 (22.7%) were from the Fraser Health Region, 6 (9.1%) reside in the Interior Health Region, 4 (6.1%) from the Northern Health Region and 2 (3%) respectively traveled to the Summit from the Yukon and Ontario.

Figure 2: Participants' ethnicity

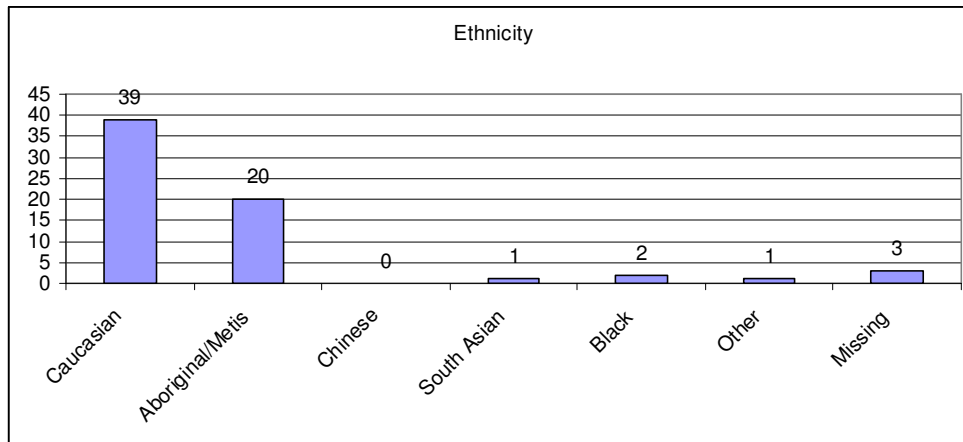
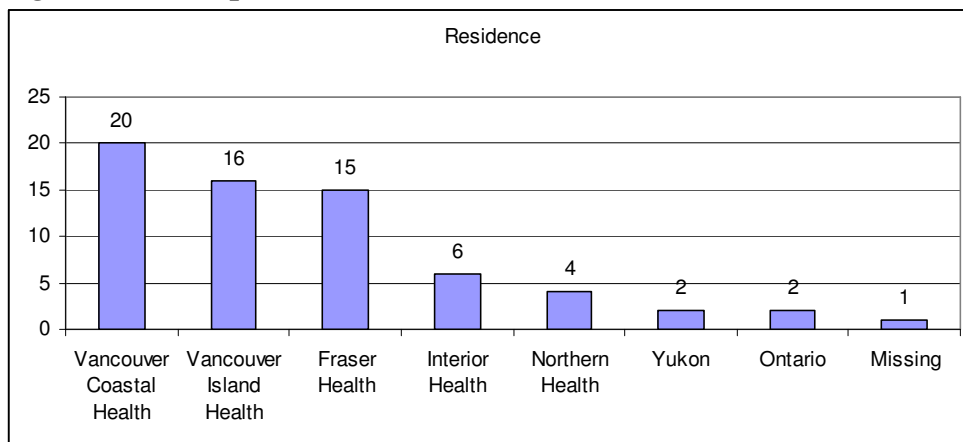
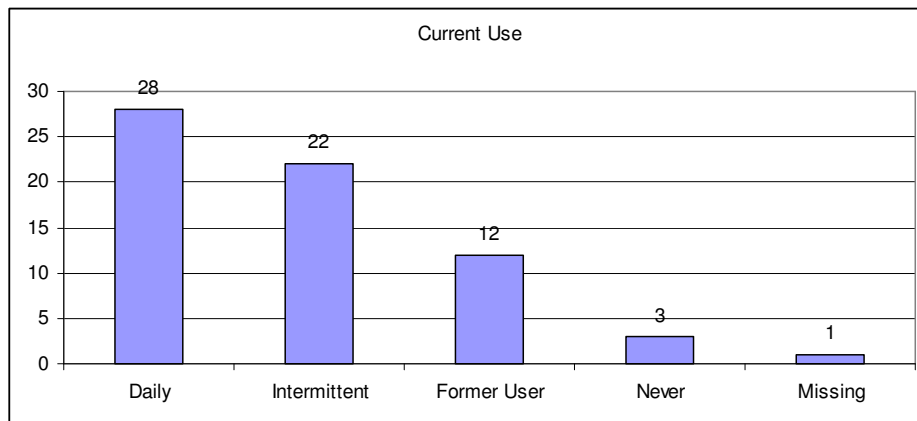


Figure 3: Participants' area of residence



28 (42.4%) survey participants stated that they currently used illicit drugs (other than cannabis) on a daily basis, 22 (33.3%) were intermittent users, and 12 (18.2%) were former users. Amongst the 50 participants who are currently using illicit drugs, 31 (47.0%) are using cocaine (powder cocaine or crack cocaine), 22 (33.3%) are using heroin, and 5 (7.6%) reported to use crystal methamphetamine. Among participants who are current or former users, the average number of years of drug use was 24 years.

Figure 4: Participants' level of current illicit drug use



Representation

The survey results indicate that the vast majority of Summit participants were current or former drug users. Younger drug users were underrepresented at the Summit; only two survey respondents were aged between 20 and 29 years.

All participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews felt that the participants at the Summit constituted a good representation of the larger drug user community in their area.

"I was amazed at the number of people from different walks of life that were there and were willing to share. It was excellent representation." (Participant Northern Health)

Interview participants felt that the people who attended the Summit were active community members with a high potential to organize and effect change in their communities.

"The people that I did see and did interacted with, I thought they were a good cross-representation, and obviously the go-getters in their community. They were the people that would say, "Okay, we should have a meeting and we should discuss this, and it will get done." (Participant Vancouver Coastal Health)

Some participants, however, expressed that some geographical regions had not been represented at the Summit. Namely, one participant felt that rural areas of Vancouver Island as well as the Delta region of the Lower Mainland were not well represented. However, other participants stated that, even though not all regions of BC and the

Yukon were represented at the Summit, the geographical representation at this first Pacific Drug User Summit was fair and that it will be the responsibility of the BC and Yukon-wide drug user group to make sure that all geographical areas are represented.

Another concern that was voiced was that people with mental health and addiction problems were not well represented at the Summit and that every effort should be made to have individuals with dual diagnosis included in the BC and Yukon-wide drug user group.

Information on Health Status of Drug Users in BC and the Yukon

As illustrated in Figure 5, the vast majority 59 (89.4%) of the survey respondents indicated that they found the topics discussed at the Summit useful. Similarly, as shown in Figure 6, the majority 60 (90.9%) of survey participants indicated that they had learned more about the health status of drug users in BC as a result of participating in the Summit

Figure 5: Response frequency by level of agreement regarding the usefulness of topics discussed at the Summit

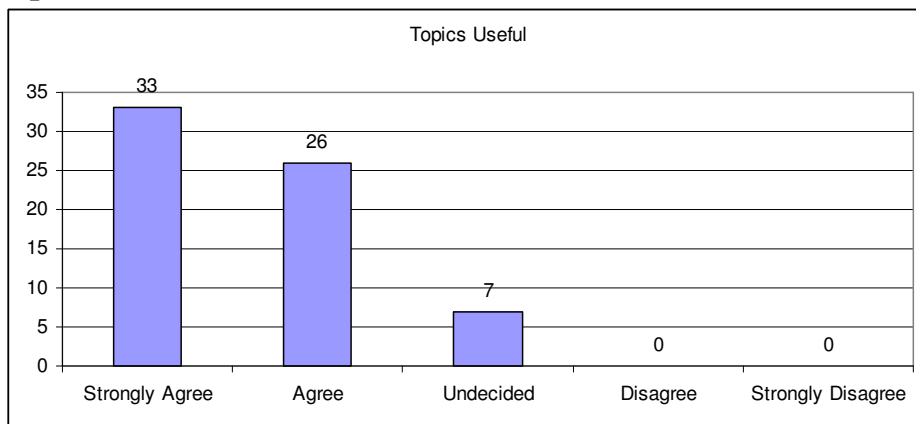
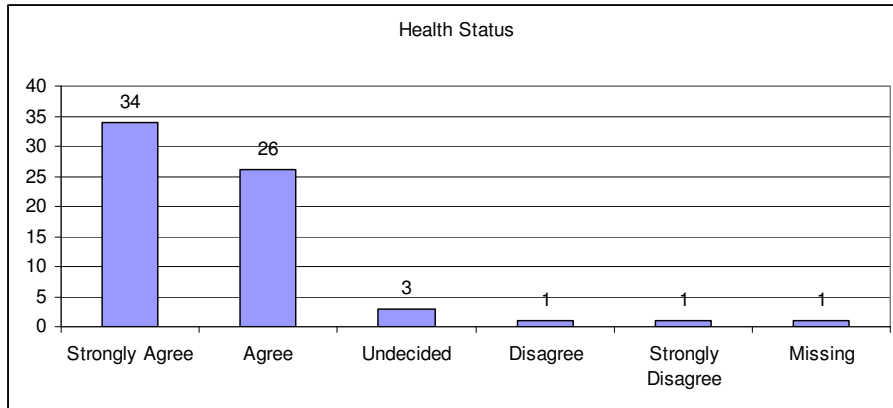


Figure 6: Response frequency by level of agreement with increased knowledge about the health status of drug users in BC



All interview participants stressed that the Summit was a unique opportunity for them to learn about drug user health issues from their peers. As reflected in the below quotes, participants stated that they felt the information provided by people who have experience with drug use was more accessible and relevant to them than information obtained through other sources.

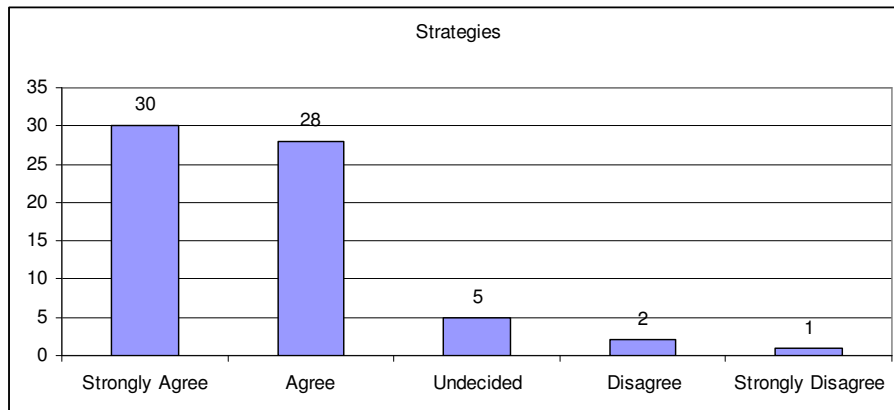
“I think it [the information on drug user health] was put more straightforward and honestly than by anybody who went to university and got a PhD in Psychology on this stuff. It was from people who had been there. That to me was the most important. That was one of the main items of the Summit that I took into account, and to me, that was really astounding.” (Participant Yukon)

“I could absorb the information better. And also without having your guard up, being able to let your guard down, you’re more open--it’s like you’re hearing things for the first time even though you’ve heard them before.” (Participant Vancouver Island Health Authority)

Strategies about how to improve the life of Drug Users

As illustrated in Figure 7, 58 (87.9%) of survey participants indicated that they had learned about strategies to improve the life of drug users in their area through participating in the Summit.

Figure 7: Response frequency by level of agreement with increased knowledge regarding strategies to improve the health of drug users



Participants in the qualitative interviews stated that the primary reason that they felt they were better able to advocate and work towards better health among drug users in their region was due to the fact that they felt more connected with drug users in other areas of BC and the Yukon as a result of the Summit. These connections in turn allowed them to learn about strategies that had been successfully used in other areas to advocate for needle exchange programs and other interventions and initiatives to improve the health of drug users.

“It gives me somebody to reach out to, and it gives me an idea of who I can go to for the information that I need... I’m connected to the whole province now. That was not the case before.” (Participant Northern Health)

“It’s good too because you can learn advice, like, on the break, I asked a lot of questions about all these problems we have, and I asked for advice, and connections. I was connecting with people because if people are having problems in their area, or whatever, they can get help there’s more people to help out to figure out how to solve the problem in that area.” (Participant Vancouver Island)

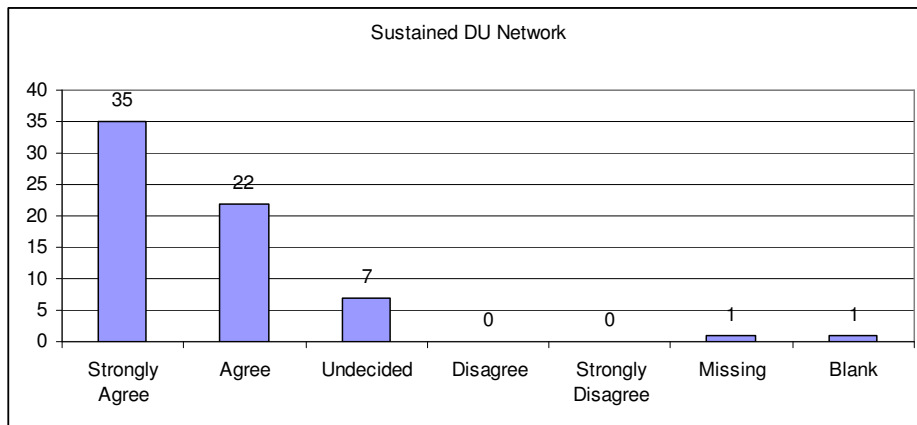
A number of participants stated that participating in the Summit had facilitated their own efforts of initiating regional drug user networks. The interview participants from the Northern and Interior health region, as well as the representative from the Yukon, stated that they were now in the process of working towards regional networks in their area. While the three participants were at different stages in getting a regional drug user group started, all stated that the Summit had facilitated their work and had motivated them to persist in their efforts, even when confronted with obstacles and barriers.

“I think [the Summit is] the best thing that could possibly happen. It connects everybody up and let’s everybody know what’s happening in other areas. I have the Northern Interior Network of Drug Users and it’s just getting off the ground in the Prince George area. It’s good to know the other connections, other things that are happening in the province the other strengths that we can reach out and receive. I got way more than I expected [out of the Summit]. I took home way more than I expected. It gave me a sense of connection and it gave me a stronger sense of purpose, because I now know, should I start feeling unwanted, or slagging up here, I know that I have people behind me that are willing to speak with me and to put me back on track again.” (Participant Northern Health)

Formation of the BC/Yukon Association of Drug War Survivors

The majority of survey respondents 57 (86.3%) indicated that they were confident that the initiated province-wide drug user organization, termed the ‘BC Association of Drug War Survivors’ will grow to become a sustained network connecting drug users from BC and the Yukon.

Figure 8: Response frequency by level of confidence regarding a sustained province-wide network of drug users



Interview participants stated that the main advantages of a drug user organization uniting participants from BC and the Yukon was that it gives a voice to drug users and provides them with more bargaining power. Interview participants highlighted the importance of drug users being included in decisions making regarding initiatives and interventions that impact their health and ultimately their quality of life.

“This [organization] is probably the most beneficial thing for drug user health that has ever happened in BC. It gives us a chance to do it for ourselves, to say this is what we need because we know what we need. We’re used to surviving for ourselves. And we’re not used to getting the opportunity to join together to build something for ourselves. This is the ground floor, and there’s nowhere to go but up now.” (Participant Northern Health)

Participants also emphasized that a province-wide drug user organization was especially important in areas outside of Vancouver and Victoria where interview participants reported that drug users were not well connected presently and where they would not have considered initiating local networks of drug users prior to the Summit due to fear of police and discrimination. Interview participants felt that an overarching province-wide drug user organization will provide them with more bargaining power with local authorities and will facilitate organizing drug users in more rural areas of BC.

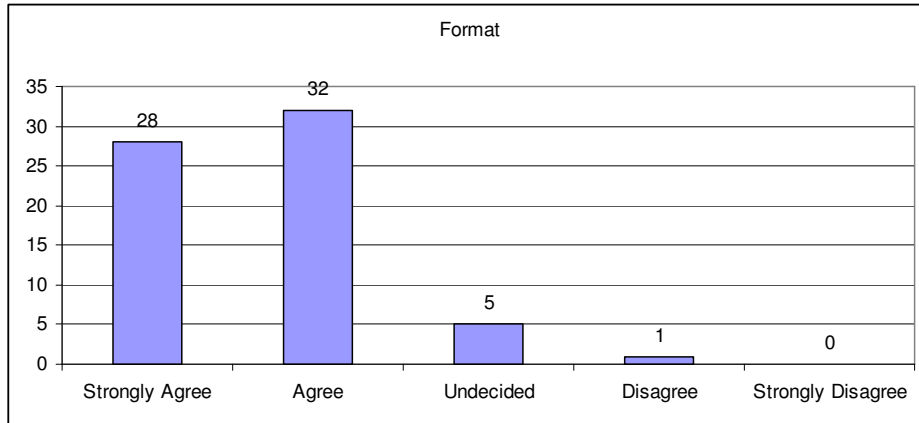
“A province-wide network would be a little bit more power in the sense that, in a city like Kamloops, to even start a drug user group, I don’t even think you could call it by that name, you would just be setting yourself up as a target for the police.” (Participant Interior Health)

“It’s really tough to get people, because there’s fear on one hand, on the other hand they think they’re gonna get hassled. It’s important to try to get them to understand, organization is better, when you have more people in a larger group. This way, you’ll be listened to, better. It’s better than just having one or two people doing this.” (Participant Fraser Health)

Summit Format

The large majority of the survey participants 60 (90.9%) indicated that the mix between speeches, presentations, discussion groups and networking opportunities was well balanced.

Figure 9: Response frequency by level of agreement with the format of the Summit



A couple of interview participants stated that they would have liked to more explicitly discuss the negative impact of prohibition on drug users' health and stated that this would be an important topic to be covered in a future meeting. Additionally, a number of participants felt that the Summit was too short and could have benefited from an additional day of discussions, meetings and networking.

In summary, the Summit participant profile indicates that the First Pacific Summit on Drug User Health has attracted its target population of active and former drug users from various areas of BC and the Yukon. The above presented results of our evaluation activities indicate that the organizers have met the objectives of the First Pacific Summit on Drug User Health by providing information on drug user health that is relevant to current and former drug users, by facilitating networking between drug users from various areas of BC and the Yukon and by initiating a larger network of drug users that spans across BC and the Yukon.

APPENDIX A

The Pacific Summit on Drug User Health 2009 Evaluation Survey

We would very much appreciate if you could take a few moments and fill in this survey to let us know what you thought about this event. All answers will be anonymous and confidential. Thank you very much for your help! Your answers will help improve the next Drug User Summit if we are able to do it again.

1. What is your gender? female male transgendered

2. What is your age? 15-19
 20-29
 30-39
 40-49
 50-59
 60-69
 70 or older

3. What is your ethnic background?
 White
 Aboriginal
 Chinese
 South Asian
 Black
 other please specify _____

4. In what city/town are you living right now?

5. Are you currently using illicit drugs? (other than pot)
 daily chipping former user never used

6. [if applicable] What drugs are you currently using? (check all that apply)

- Heroin
- Cocaine
- Rock
- Crystal Meth
- other (please specify)_____
- other (please specify)_____

7. How many years have you used illicit drugs? _____years

8. Are you currently on Methadone Treatment?

- yes
- no

9. How did you learn about the Pacific Summit on Drug User Health?

- VANDU
- local drug user group
- community agency
- other user
- other please specify _____

10. I feel that I know more about the health status of drug users in British Columbia as a result of attending this Summit (please select one)

- strongly agree
- agree
- undecided
- disagree
- strongly disagree

11. I found the topics discussed during this Summit useful

- strongly agree
- agree
- undecided
- disagree
- strongly disagree

12. I found there was a good mix between speeches, presentations, discussions and networking

- strongly agree
- agree
- undecided
- disagree
- strongly disagree

APPENDIX B

Qualitative Interview Guide Pacific Drug User Summit

The purpose of these questions are to learn about your experiences and opinions about the Pacific Summit on Drug Users Health that you have recently attended. There are no right or wrong, answers. We are very interested in hearing about your experiences and opinions of the event. All your answers will be confidential.

<i>Topic 1. Recruitment and Expectations</i>	
Questions	Probes
How did you hear about the Summit?	Who contacted you?
What do you see as the advantages of having a Drug User Health Summit?	
What did you expect to get out of this Summit?	What were your expectations before the Summit?
Do you feel the people that took part in the Summit represent your community well?	If yes, how so? If not, why not? Who was missing in your opinion?
<i>Topic 2. Summit Content and Format</i>	
Could you describe what parts of the Summit you found most useful?	Probe for organizing drug users, advocacy, etc.
Could you describe what parts of the Summit you found least useful?	What parts of the Summit did you find unnecessary?
What would you improve if there was another drug user health Summit?	What other topics and issues do you think would have been useful to cover?
What did you think about the various presentations?	Did you feel they were useful to you? What topics were most useful for you?

<p>What did you think of the discussion groups?</p>	<p>Were the topics discussed relevant to you? Do you think that useful information was gathered during these discussions?</p>
<p>How was the information regarding drug user's health different from other information that you have received in the past such as for example from health service providers?</p>	
<p>Networking</p>	
<p>How did taking part in the Summit influence how connected you feel with other drug users in the Province?</p>	<p>Do you feel more connected with other drug users as a result of this Summit?</p>
<p>How do you feel about development of a province wide drug user network?</p>	<p>What do you think are the advantages of a province wide drug user network? What do you think would help keep such a network going? What do you think would be some of the difficulties of maintaining such a network?</p>
<p>Was there enough time for you to get to know users from other areas of BC?</p>	<p>Do you feel you learned about the situation of drug users in other parts of the province?</p>