Our plan to

***end substance use harms***

through connection,
collaboration, and evidence.

***Strategic Plan***
2026–2029



BRITISH COLUMBIA
CENTRE ON
**SUBSTANCE USE**
*Networking researchers, educators & care providers*

With gratitude, we acknowledge that the physical office of the BC Centre on Substance Use is located on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səl̓ílwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We further acknowledge that the reach of our work touches the territories of all 204 First Nations in B.C.

We further acknowledge that the ongoing criminalization, institutionalization, and discrimination against people who use substances disproportionately harms Indigenous peoples. We are committed to working with our Indigenous partners to improve substance use care for all Indigenous peoples.

# BC Centre on Substance Use *Strategic Plan* 2026–2029


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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the year this plan was published, British Columbia marked 10 years since the province declared the toxic drug public health emergency in 2016. This crisis continues to evolve in British Columbia and across Canada, driven by an increasingly unpredictable toxic drug supply, and responses that are often hampered by persistent stigma, and significant pressures on our health care system. The urgency of this moment demands coordinated, evidence-based, and compassionate action.

The BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) plays a critical role as a provincially networked centre of expertise, connecting research, clinical guidance, education, and clinical service supports to improve substance use care. Guided by our vision of *ending substance use harms* and our mission to mobilize expertise to improve substance use care, the BCCSU is uniquely positioned to help shape system-wide responses grounded in evidence and informed by the voices of clinicians, researchers, people with lived and living experience, families and caregivers.

Building on our foundation of nationally and internationally recognized leadership in research, clinical guidance, education, training, and clinical service supports, the BCCSU's 2026–2029 Strategic Plan sets out a focused and forward-looking roadmap to address the complex and interconnected challenges of substance use. This plan reflects a commitment to advancing equity, strengthening partnerships, and driving meaningful systems change across British Columbia and beyond.

Over the next three years, the BCCSU will focus on five interconnected strategic areas of focus: shaping substance use care, advancing reconciliation, communicating impact and expanding reach, cultivating coalitions, and fostering organizational sustainability and resilience.

Across all areas of focus, our commitment to quality, knowledge, partnership, equity, innovation, and reconciliation will guide action. We will continue to champion approaches that reduce stigma, address systemic barriers, and improve access to high-quality, evidence-based care for people who use substances.

The challenges ahead are significant, but so too are the opportunities for meaningful change. Guided by this strategic plan, the BCCSU will continue to work with existing and new partners across systems to transform substance use policy and practice, improve care, and move British Columbia closer to ending substance use harms.

# OUR PAST, OUR FUTURE

The BCCSU emerged from years of provincial planning focused on the need for a centre dedicated to substance use and addiction.

The Urban Health Research Initiative (UHRI), a former program within the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, would serve as the launching pad for the creation of the BCCSU. First established in 2006, UHRI quickly became an internationally recognized leader in substance use research. From this foundation, the BCCSU was established in April 2017, expanding our scope to incorporate clinical care guidance and health professional education and training as a tool to mobilize evidence into action. Since that time, we have grown our multidisciplinary team of exceptionally talented and committed staff, developed numerous partnerships with interest-holders, and deepened our already-strong connections with people with lived and living experience of substance use, and their families and loved-ones. Further, we've added a fourth core function of clinical and operational service supports, encompassing our ongoing work on the Road to Recovery, Drug Checking and operating the 24/7 Addiction Medicine Clinician Support Line.

**Since our inception, the BCCSU has trained thousands of clinicians with over 100,000 all-time clinician engagements through online learning, outreach seminars, preceptorships, and the largest addiction medicine training program in North America.**

We have published dozens of provincial and national treatment guidelines, helping to close evidence-to-practice gaps that are prevalent in health care, published more than 1000 peer-reviewed research articles, and undertaken countless knowledge mobilization and engagement activities that have informed global responses to the ongoing toxic drug crisis.

Highlights from our first strategic plan from 2022-2025 include:

- Co-developed Road to Recovery with Providence Health Care, an innovative approach to substance use care that has been adopted as BC's recovery care model, and expanded throughout the province
- Expanded our capacity to support innovative substance use research and education by raising $7.5M through philanthropy to develop four new substance-use-focused professorships at the University of British Columbia

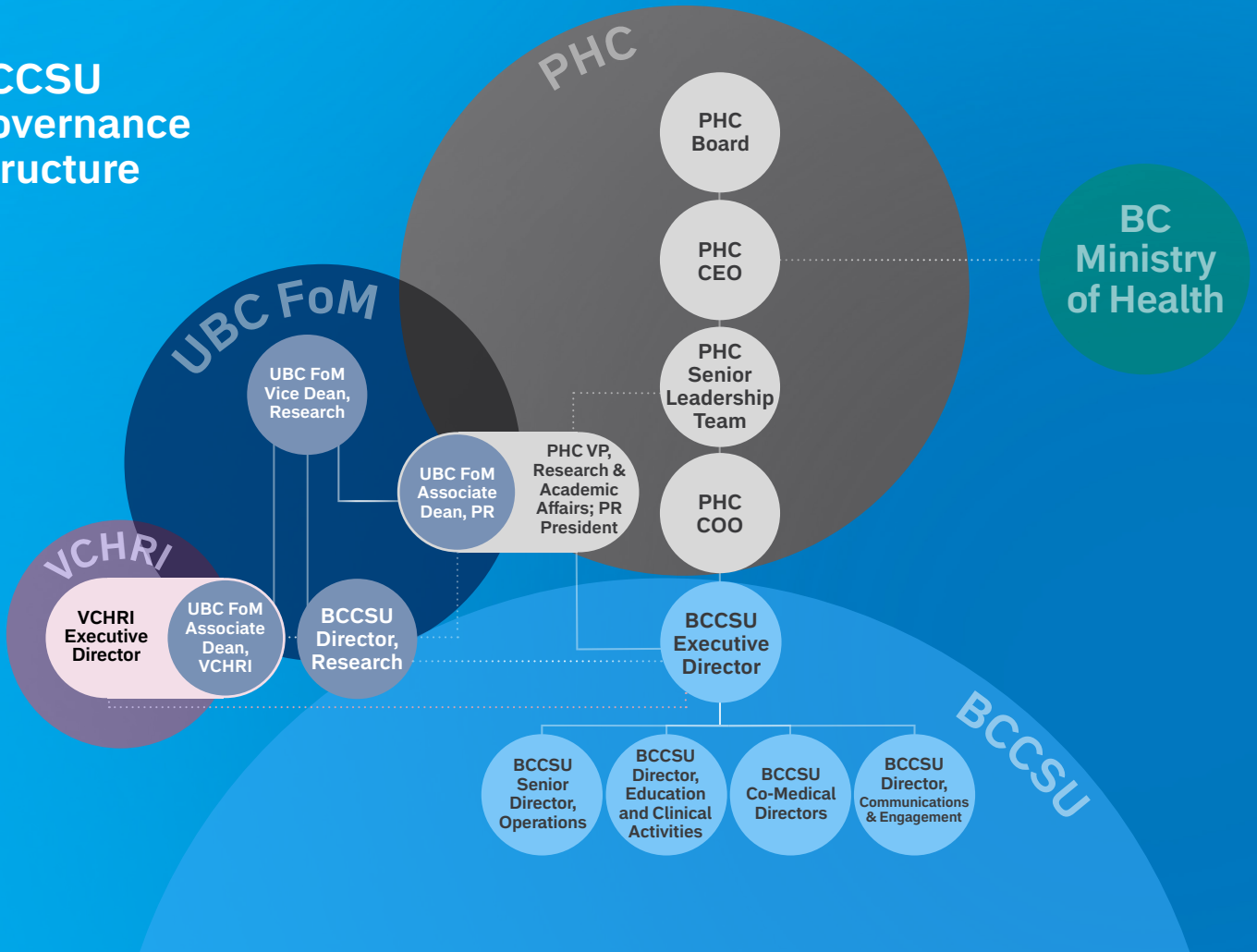
- Deepened alignment between our research and the priorities of affected communities by strengthening our community engagement through hiring a dedicated knowledge translation coordinator for research activities
- Strengthened the relevance of our programs and resources for communities throughout BC by expanding the provincial and interdisciplinary representation in our clinical guideline committees
- Grew our ability to address Indigenous-led research priorities, enhance partnerships with First Nations and Indigenous organizations, and support cultural safety and anti-Indigenous racism training through a new Manager of Indigenous Research Initiatives & Engagement role created in partnership with the PHC Indigenous Wellness and Reconciliation team

As the toxic drug crisis evolves, so too does the work of the BCCSU. Over the next three years, we will drive change informed by research and lived experience. This strategic plan outlines the steps we're committed to taking in order to transform approaches to addressing substance use, ending toxic drug deaths, and improving the lives of people who use substances.

# OUR GOVERNANCE

The BCCSU is an academic health science centre housed within Providence Health Care (PHC) and Providence Research and is also a University of British Columbia (UBC) Faculty of Medicine research centre. We are among Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute's (VCHRI) affiliated research centres and have several faculty and affiliate members at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and other BC and Canadian universities . Our strategic plan was developed in alignment with the strategic plans, as well as the equity, diversity, and inclusion commitments, of these host organizations. Our plan is also informed by our partnership with the PHC Indigenous Wellness and Reconciliation team and several of the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and BC's *In Plain Sight* Report.

# BCCSU Governance Structure






## BCCSU Core Functions

The BCCSU is a provincially networked organization with a mandate to develop, help implement, and evaluate evidence-based approaches to substance use and addiction through integrated activities of its four core functions: research and evaluation, education and training, clinical care guidance, and clinical and operational service supports.

# OUR PROCESS

At the centre of the BCCSU's work are the many people and organizations who make change possible: people with lived and living experience of substance use and their loved-ones; community and health systems partners, including nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, social workers, psychologists, physicians and other health professionals who offer care across the continuum of substance use services; recovery service providers, partners from universities and research institutes; the BCCSU's host institutions; provincial and federal governments; donors; and so many more.

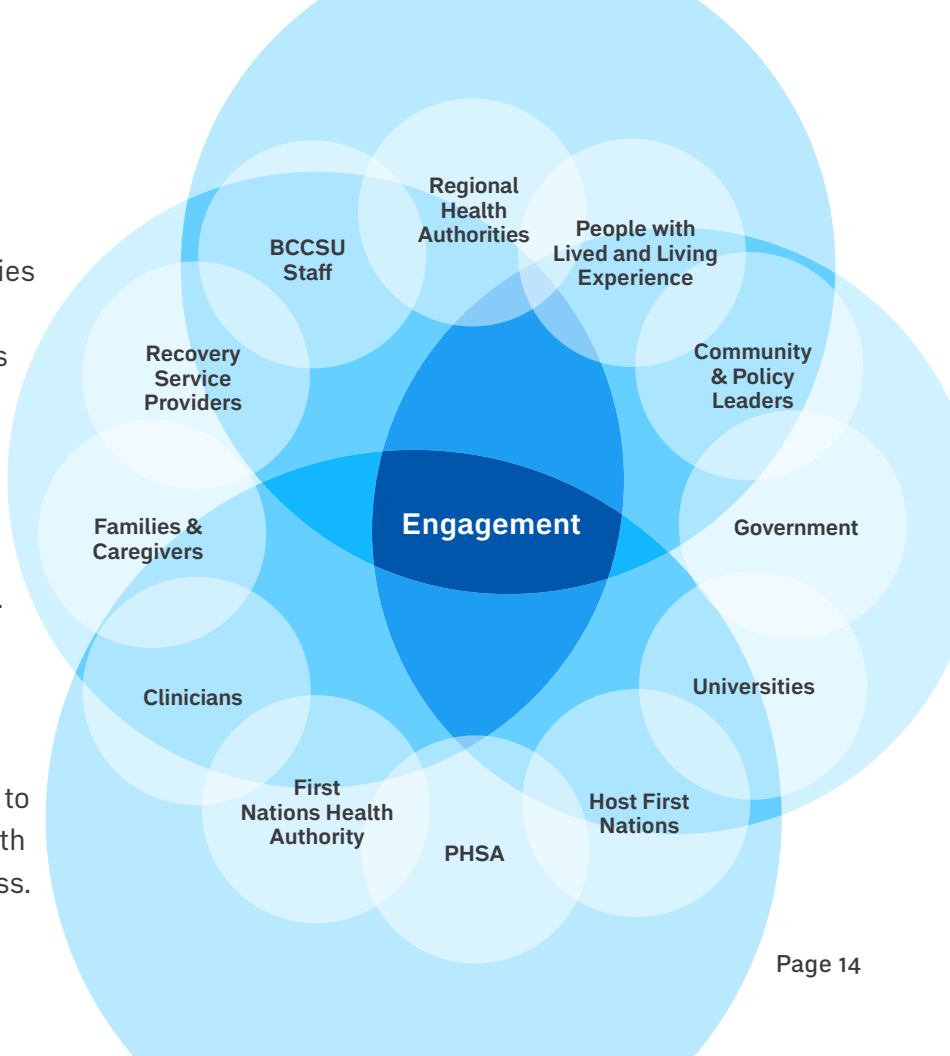
Our strategic plan was developed with input from these groups and individuals to ensure our priorities are aligned. We also sought input from those who know our work best: our staff. All this was done to understand their numerous perspectives, foster collaboration, and promote principles of collaboration and equity in all aspects of our work.

**We approached this process with these goals in mind:**

1. Establish clear organizational priorities to guide our future work grounded in input from partners and communities most impacted by substance use.

2. Create a framework for accountability driven by the measurement and reporting of success as defined by these groups.

The result is a refresh of the BCCSU's mission, values, and strategic areas of focus, which will guide our work for the next three years. We also defined a plan to put these elements into action, along with a reporting structure to track our progress.



# OUR VISION

## Ending substance use harms

*Our vision articulates the future we are working to realize and provides direction for our strategic priorities and collective efforts.*

# OUR MISSION

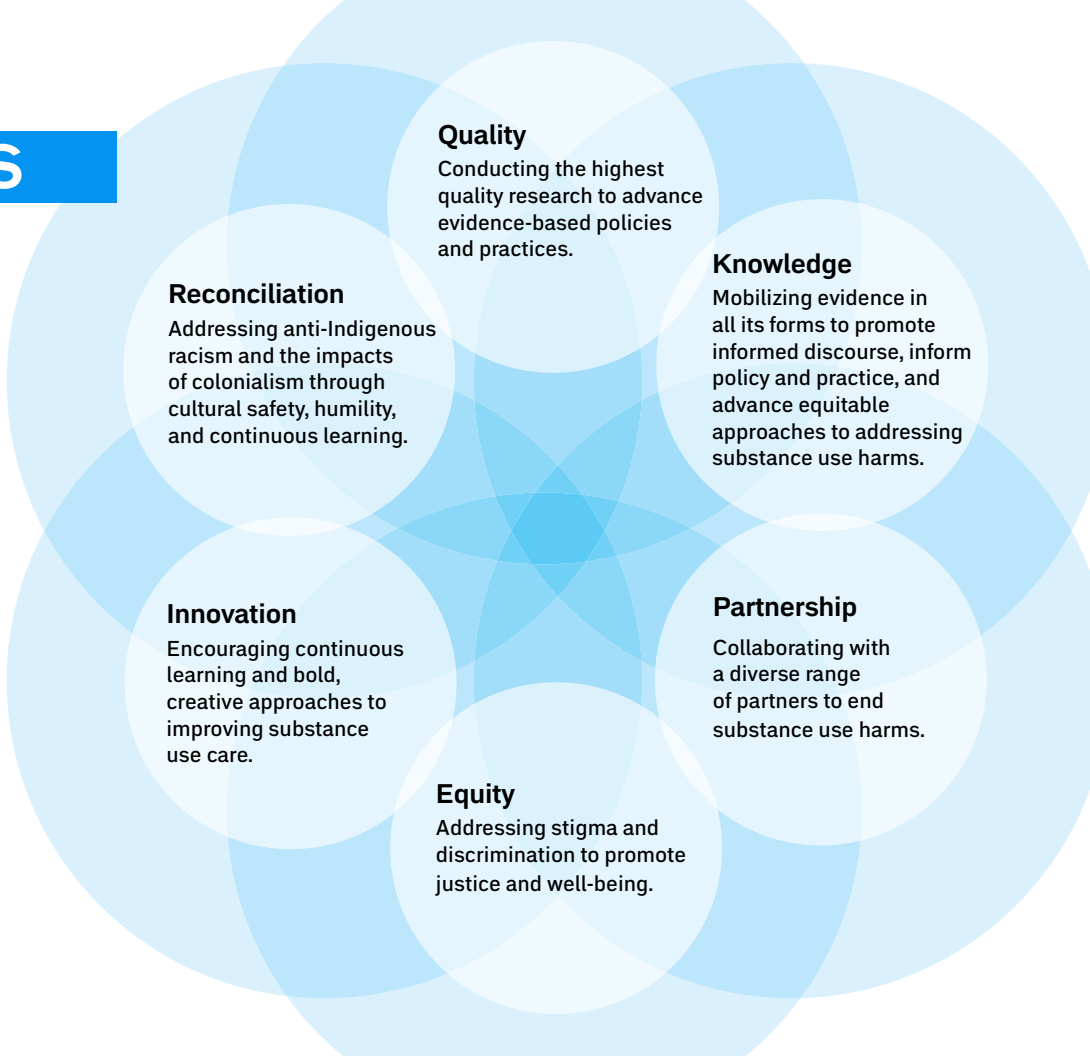
## Mobilizing expertise to improve substance use care

We connect  people across the substance use ecosystem, including clinicians, researchers, people with lived and living experience, families and caregivers, policymakers, and community organizations, with knowledge  to improve substance use outcomes through research, guidance, training, and collaboration.

*Our mission lays out the  steps we're taking today to move us towards the future we envision.*

# OUR VALUES

These values set the foundation for how we do our work, guide our decision-making, and are embedded into our strategic areas of focus.



# OUR STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

*This is the road map for achieving our vision of ending substance use harms.*

Centred around our core functions of research and evaluation; education and training; clinical care guidance; and operational service supports, these areas of focus will drive our work to transform approaches to substance use.

**These areas of focus build upon our strengths :**

- Our compassionate, dedicated, and talented team
- Our track record of internationally recognized research, clinical and educational expertise, and innovative service supports
- Our partnerships with  experts and rights holders from across the province and country, including those with lived and living expertise as well as family and caregivers

Although progress has been made over the last several years, these areas of focus also identify where we still need to grow as an organization to support BC's health and social systems to better address the longstanding, unmet needs of people who use substances.

Given the rapidly changing landscape impacting people who use substances, we have planned for the next three years. This timeline will help us to be responsive and quickly implement new knowledge and lessons learned.

Achieving the objectives set out in this plan cannot be done alone; it will take our collective efforts to end substance use harms. That work starts here.

# Our Strategic Areas of Focus

- Shaping Substance Use Care Through Informed Discourse
- Advancing Reconciliation
- Communicating Impact and Expanding Reach
- Cultivating Coalitions
- Fostering Organizational Sustainability and Resilience

# Shaping Substance Use Care Through Informed Discourse

***Goal:*** *To advance effective substance use care through informed and respectful dialogue that centres high-quality evidence and lived experience.*

Leveraging our foundation of research excellence informed by lived expertise, we will help shape effective responses to address the impacts of substance use on individuals, families, and communities by supporting and participating in informed discourse.

**How we'll do this:**

- Identify new opportunities to contribute to public dialogue on evidence-based substance use care
- Publish accessible, plain-language materials to ensure high-quality evidence reaches policymakers and the broader public
- Translate evidence into actionable policy recommendations on priority substance use system improvements

# Advancing Reconciliation

***Goal:*** *To advance substance use responses that recognize and uphold Indigenous rights, address historical and ongoing harms, and build new relationships based on mutual respect and true partnership.*

By expanding our Indigenous partnerships, creating opportunities to deepen staff learning and reflection, and embedding anti-racist and anti-colonial principles and practices in all aspects of our work, we will strengthen our ability to advance substance use approaches that meet the needs of Indigenous people, and meaningfully address anti-Indigenous racism and the impacts of colonialism in substance use care.

**How we'll do this:**

- Strengthen our structural foundation to advance reconciliation across the BCCSU's work
- Provide staff with opportunities for reflective assessment, workforce learning and equity-informed improvement
- Broaden our partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations and groups in BC and beyond

# Communicating Impact and Expanding Reach

***Goal:*** *To be recognized across BC and beyond for impactful contributions to advancing substance use knowledge, care, and support.*

The BCCSU's work is enabled by its established reputation as a trusted scientific authority and collaborative partner. In order to maintain and build our influence, we will pursue new opportunities to highlight the breadth of our work and impact.

**How we'll do this:**

- Build the capacity of a greater range of experts to speak publicly about the diversity of BCCSU's work
- Publish research and impact summaries that demonstrate the breadth of our work
- Pursue media opportunities that strengthen BCCSU's reputation as a trusted, evidence-driven leader in substance use knowledge and care

# Cultivating Coalitions

***Goal:*** *To build, strengthen, and sustain coalitions to address substance use harms through shared learning, coordinated action and collective impact.*

Working in partnership across the health and social systems, the BCCSU will drive change informed by research and a broad range of experts in substance use and intersecting social and community services, including people with lived and living experience of substance use.

**How we'll do this:**

- Identify and strengthen opportunities for collaboration to inform partnership development, align efforts, and accelerate collective impact
- Expand our Affiliate Research Scientist network to broaden our expertise and opportunities for collaboration

# Fostering Organizational Sustainability And Resilience

***Goal:*** *To cultivate financial sustainability, staff well-being & retention, collaboration, and respectful and inclusive environments.*

Our people and resources are the foundation our work is built upon. By investing in our organizational sustainability, we will strengthen our ability to inform effective responses now, and for years to come.

**How we'll do this:**

- Foster a resilient and inclusive organization by integrating EDI principles into organizational priorities
- Implement sustainable practices to improve staff well-being and increase retention
- Enhance financial forecasting, budgeting and decision-making
- Develop and implement tools to enhance cross-functional collaboration

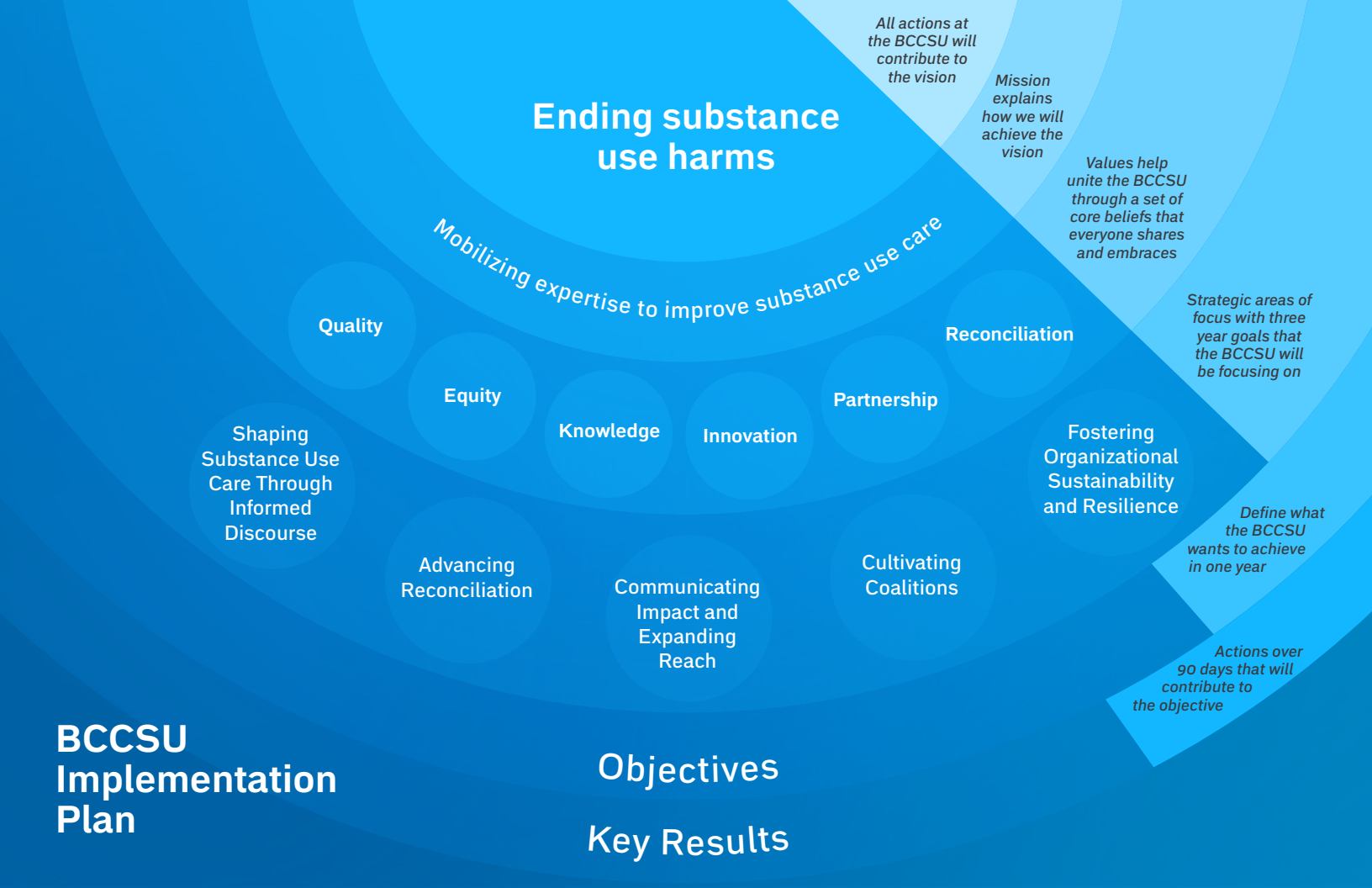
# OUR COMMITMENT

This strategic plan is only the beginning. It provides the framework that sets our priorities. While circumstances may require us to revisit these priorities over the next three years, how we make those decisions will be guided by this strategic plan, the values we share, and our vision for a better future.

Alongside our strategic plan is an implementation plan that will ensure accountability and transparency by tracking our progress. We will set objectives, measure key results, and report back to our network of partners.

We are grateful for the time and input of all who contributed and gave feedback to this process.

Our commitment is to put this strategy into action. We commit to living the values described here and ensuring accountability for these commitments through transparent reporting on our progress.


All actions at the BCCSU will contribute to the vision
Mission explains how we will achieve the vision
Values help unite the BCCSU through a set of core beliefs that everyone shares and embraces
Strategic areas of focus with three year goals that the BCCSU will be focusing on
Define what the BCCSU wants to achieve in one year
Actions over 90 days that will contribute to the objective
Ending substance use harms
Mobilizing expertise to improve substance use care
Quality
Equity
Knowledge
Innovation
Partnership
Reconciliation
Shaping Substance Use Care Through Informed Discourse
Advancing Reconciliation
Communicating Impact and Expanding Reach
Cultivating Coalitions
Fostering Organizational Sustainability and Resilience
BCCSU Implementation Plan
Objectives
Key Results

# Glossary

**Discrimination**

Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age or sexual orientation.

**Diversity**

Diversity is about the individual. It is about the variety of unique dimensions, qualities and characteristics we all possess and distinguish us from one another.

**Equity**

Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances, needs, and experiences, which may need to be considered in the distribution of resources and opportunities to achieve equal outcomes.

### Evidence-based

These are practices that are based on research that is conducted through validated scientific processes.

### Inclusion

Inclusion means creating an environment that accepts and values difference, and where everyone is valued and treated with fairness and respect.

### Indigenous peoples

Original inhabitants of a region and their descendants who have ties to the land and their own distinct governance structures, cultures, languages, traditions, and identity. In Canada, Indigenous peoples include those who may identify as First Nations (status and non-status), Métis and/or Inuit.

### Justice

Describes an outcome where the treatment of individuals is guided by fairness, honesty, and integrity.

### People with Lived and Living Experience

People who have used substances in the past (lived experience) or currently use substances (living experience).

### Reconciliation

An ongoing process of establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples requiring four key steps: awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior. Further, it includes a commitment and actions that we undertake each and every day to lay proper groundwork through hearing truth, pursuing justice, and building respectful and reciprocal relations.

### Well-being

A state that is achieved when personal goals of health, happiness, prosperity, and safety are met.

BRITISH COLUMBIA CENTRE ON SUBSTANCE USE

*Networking researchers, educators & care providers*

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