

**From:** [Corey Ranger](#)  
**To:** [Council](#)  
**Subject:** Lewis Street Encampment Displacement and Associated Harms  
**Date:** Friday, February 6, 2026 1:39:43 PM  
**Attachments:** [North Cowichan Encampment Displacement Accountability Letter Ranger 2026-02-06.pdf](#)

---

Some people who received this message don't often get email from **FIPPA s. 22(1)** . [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Mayor and Council, please find attached a letter outlining my concerns regarding the harms that followed the displacement of residents from the Lewis Street encampment and the actions I believe are urgently required.

Dear Mayor and Council,

I am writing to express deep concern regarding the [lack of accountability](#) taken for the harms that followed the displacement of residents from the Lewis Street encampment.

In a recent CHEK News article, a municipal social planner is quoted as stating that “there’s no correlation between our actions and the overdose events, so no one’s holding us to blame for that.” This assertion is inaccurate and deeply troubling, particularly given the well-established evidence linking involuntary displacement to overdose risk. The absence of accountability does not equate to the absence of responsibility—particularly when the harms were foreseeable, observable, and well documented.

I am a resident of the City of Duncan and South Cowichan, and a registered nurse with over 13 years of experience working in street outreach, harm reduction, and community health across multiple jurisdictions in British Columbia and Alberta. In a prior CHEK News article, [“Very Scary: Cowichan records as many as 80 drug overdoses in a single night,”](#) it was explicitly noted that the surge in overdoses occurred just hours after the Lewis Street encampment was cleared and residents were forcibly dispersed to new locations across the community. This temporal relationship cannot be dismissed as coincidence, particularly in light of the substantial body of evidence linking involuntary displacement to serious health harms.

Research [consistently demonstrates](#) that involuntary displacement worsens overdose risk, increases hospitalizations, disrupts access to medications for opioid use disorder, and contributes to preventable deaths among people experiencing homelessness who use drugs. The [BC Centre on Substance Use](#) has been unequivocal in its position: evicting and displacing people creates additional harms. Any concerns about public disorder must be weighed against the clear evidence that displacement destabilizes people, exacerbates vulnerability, and magnifies risk—especially in the context of an unregulated and toxic drug supply.

These conclusions are echoed in international human rights guidance. In 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing released the [National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada](#), which affirms several principles directly relevant to the actions taken in North Cowichan. Among them:

- International human rights law does not permit governments to destroy people’s homes, even if those homes are improvised or established without legal authority. Removing residents without meaningful engagement and without providing acceptable alternative housing constitutes a forced eviction and a gross violation of human rights.
- The right to remain in one’s home and community is central to the right to housing. Any relocation must involve meaningful, ongoing engagement with residents and must not result in continued or worsened homelessness, fractured relationships, or increased exposure to harm.

Similarly, the [BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner](#) has stated that forced evictions are isolating and traumatizing, increase exposure to gender-based violence, and heighten risks associated with the toxic drug supply. The Office has further warned that unless underlying causes are addressed, encampments will inevitably return—often under more dangerous conditions.

We could have chosen a different path. North Cowichan is not limited to punitive, dehumanizing approaches to housing insecurity. Housing is a [basic human right](#), and there are evidence-based, compassionate alternatives available. To suggest that Council's hands were tied, or that identifying alternative sheltering options would have taken too long, reflects a form of weaponized incompetence rather than genuine constraint.

As a community member in the Cowichan Valley, I experienced profound moral distress witnessing the aftermath of the decampment. Individuals were pushed into increasingly unsafe environments, including a semi-submerged marsh. I have been informed that some new encampment locations are now so inaccessible that emergency responders cannot safely reach them. To attribute the subsequent surge in poisonings solely to a "bad batch" of drugs is both reductive and irresponsible. Forced displacement amplifies risk. In the context of a toxic drug supply, amplified risk translates directly into death.

When people are pushed into harder-to-reach locations, disconnected from health and outreach services, and stripped of community supports, the resulting harms are not accidental. They are the predictable outcomes of policy decisions. This is structural violence.

No one in our community is disposable. While Council may attempt to absolve itself of responsibility for the harms many of us have witnessed, absolution does not equal innocence. Safety is a right that extends to everyone, including those deprived of housing.

As a resident of the Cowichan Valley, I call on Mayor and Council to take the following immediate actions:

- Designate safe, accessible alternative sheltering and camping options without delay
- Allocate additional funding to local outreach and support teams
- Cease all further encampment sweeps and forced displacements
- Convene a Housing Justice meeting that meaningfully includes encampment residents

These steps represent a bare minimum—an immediate harm-reduction response to slow the damage already underway. They fall squarely within the authority of municipal government.

Longer term, this community requires expanded low-barrier indoor shelter options, sustained advocacy for income supports and rental supplements, meaningful rental market controls, and investment in modular and permanent housing solutions. Continued reliance on displacement as a strategy will only perpetuate harm and deepen the crisis.

I urge you to act accordingly.

Sincerely,

Corey Ranger  
Registered Nurse  
Resident, City of Duncan and South Cowichan