
NEWS RELEASE

Still calling it an “accident”? Seriously?

Wally Oppal, Medical Health Officer, BCAA join the call to change the discourse

VANCOUVER, BC, Jan. 31, 2019—A new campaign by The Community Against Preventable Injuries (Preventable) suggests that one simple change could alter the reality of preventable injuries in British Columbia: reconsider the word “accident.”

An “accident” means something unfortunate that happens unexpectedly and unintentionally. Many British Columbians believe that serious injuries, like those from motor vehicle crashes, are just “accidents” waiting to happen. In reality, most injuries are both predictable and preventable, and yet, an average of 283 British Columbians die each year¹ and 3,762 are hospitalized² from road-related injuries.

The campaign, called “Changing the Discourse,” encourages media, first responders, road safety experts, and the public to use different words to describe injuries.

Dr. Varinder Badh experienced a personal tragedy that showed her first-hand the power of words: her parents were killed in a car crash in 2008. This terrible incident was referred to as an “accident”—when we talk about preventable injuries as unavoidable “accidents,” we minimize the impact they can have on the families affected by them.

Dr. Badh’s PhD work found that the words we use to describe injuries can affect how we perceive the choices that lead to situations where a serious injury could happen. She urges us to “learn a new language” and reflect on the attitude that serious injuries and death are inevitable.

“Word use is an active choice. If we all used the words ‘car crash’ or ‘collision’ instead of the word ‘accident,’ we can start to think of these injuries as avoidable,” she says.

Influential British Columbians have joined Preventable in this initiative. The Honourable Wally Oppal, former MLA and BC Supreme Court and Court of Appeal Justice; Shom Sen, President and CEO of the BC Automobile Association (BCAA); and Dr. Emily Newhouse, Medical Health Officer for Vancouver Coastal Health, have all lent their voices to the campaign.

Over 300 packages are being sent to media outlets, police and fire chiefs, and road safety organizations across BC. Each package contains a booklet with impact statements and a token to serve as a physical reminder that words have power.

“These people are often in the public eye,” says Dr. Ian Pike, spokesperson for Preventable. “They have the power to shape our attitudes and perceptions. Whether it’s injuries that happen on the road, work, play, home, or on the water, we hope that they can lead the sea change needed to shift how we think about preventable injuries.”

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1 Motor Vehicle Related Fatalities: 10-Year Statistics for BC, RoadSafetyBC, 5-year average, 2013-2017.
2 Discharge Abstract Database, Ministry of Health, BCIRPU Injury Data Online Tool, 2018.

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About Preventable:

Preventable is a province-wide, multi-partner organization raising awareness, transforming attitudes, and ultimately changing behaviours. The goal of the organization and its partners is to significantly reduce the number and severity of preventable injuries in BC. Preventable's strategy is based on two years of extensive research to develop a comprehensive understanding of how and why preventable injuries occur throughout the province. Preventable's work is made possible through the financial and in-kind support of a variety of organizations that continue to sign on as partners in fighting the epidemic of preventable injuries in BC. Now in its 10th year of activity, the campaign is an evolution in Preventable's ongoing discussion with British Columbians about the epidemic proportions of preventable injuries.

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