

# Vancouver Coastal Health FOI Requests: Fee Estimates, Scope Narrowing, and Current Status

Prepared for Scott Gilbert from Gmail correspondence and public FOIPPA administration sources. Prepared July 6, 2026.

This report is a factual chronology and document package. It is not a legal opinion. It avoids reproducing unrelated personal remarks and omits repeated quoted email chains, routine signatures, confidentiality footers, and land acknowledgments except where needed for context.

## 1. One-page executive summary

Three related Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) FOI files were identified in the reviewed Gmail records. The first, VCH FOI 2025-F-355, was received by VCH on November 12, 2025 and sought five fiscal years of substance-use, detox, overdose, harm-reduction, safer-supply, and funding/governance records. On November 19, 2025, VCH issued a processing-fee estimate based on 475 total search/retrieval hours, with 472 billable hours at \$30 per hour. The billable locating/retrieval portion alone is \$14,160. VCH indicated that a deposit or fee-waiver request would be required before processing would proceed.

The second identified file, VCH FOI 2026-F-457, was submitted as a narrower successor request for two fiscal years, prioritizing existing summary reports over raw data extraction. On May 11, 2026, VCH issued a partial fee estimate of \$780 for Item A only. After a \$390 deposit was paid, VCH advised on May 27, 2026 that the estimate was only for Item A, that one part of Item C alone would require an additional 30 hours, and that a further fee estimate would be "very large." At \$30 per hour, 30 additional hours equals \$900 before any additional work on other parts of Item C or Item D. The file was later closed and the deposit was reimbursed by cheque.

The third identified file, VCH FOI 2026-F-487, reframed the request again as existing final high-level records only, excluding draft records, email searches, raw data extraction, custom analysis, and working files. VCH responded that the new request remained broadly worded, wide-ranging, and vague, and warned that it may apply to the OIPC under FIPPA s. 43 to disregard the request if clarification and narrowing were not provided. On July 6, 2026, the request was narrowed again by reducing the period to April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 and removing the category for executive/board/ministry briefing notes, reports, presentations, and evaluation documents.

Across the reviewed correspondence, no email was located showing that VCH granted a fee waiver or issued a clear written decision approving or denying a fee waiver on both statutory grounds advanced: inability to pay and public interest/public health. The correspondence instead shows fee-waiver discussion being deferred, contextualized, or overtaken by closure/refund of the request.

## 2. Condensed chronology

| Date                   | File / event                                 | Scope / fee / status                                                                                                     |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nov. 12, 2025          | 2025-F-355 acknowledged                      | Five fiscal years: detox, overdose data, harm reduction/safer supply, funding/governance. \$10 application fee required. |
| Nov. 19, 2025          | 2025-F-355 fee estimate                      | 475 total hours; first 3 hours free; 472 billable hours x \$30/hour = \$14,160 billable locating/retrieval estimate.     |
| Dec. 17, 2025          | 2025-F-355 affordability/narrowing follow-up | VCH provided public links/suggestions but the reviewed email set does not show a waiver being granted.                   |
| Jan. 8 / Apr. 28, 2026 | 2025-F-355 closed                            | VCH advised the deadline for paying the processing fee had passed and the file was closed.                               |
| Apr. 28, 2026          | 2026-F-457 acknowledged                      | Narrowed successor: two fiscal years; existing summary reports prioritized over raw data extraction.                     |

|                      |                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May 11, 2026         | 2026-F-457 partial fee estimate            | \$780 estimate for Item A only; 27 total hours, 24 billable hours x \$30 plus \$60 preparation/handling. \$390 deposit required.                                                              |
| May 27, 2026         | 2026-F-457 scope/cost escalation           | After deposit, VCH advised Item C(1) alone would add 30 hours (\$900), and further estimate would be very large.                                                                              |
| May 28-Jun. 15, 2026 | Closure/refund                             | VCH confirmed file closure and refund cheque processing. A later email stated fee waivers have a high threshold.                                                                              |
| Jul. 2, 2026         | Refund cheque mailed                       | VCH advised finance confirmed the cheque was mailed June 17, 2026.                                                                                                                            |
| Jun. 17, 2026        | 2026-F-487 acknowledged                    | New high-level-records request; \$10 application fee required.                                                                                                                                |
| Jul. 6, 2026         | 2026-F-487 scope objection / s. 43 warning | VCH said the request was broad, vague, and may unreasonably interfere with operations; warned of possible OIPC s. 43 application.                                                             |
| Jul. 6, 2026         | Current narrowing reply sent               | Scope reduced to Apr. 1, 2023-Mar. 31, 2024; executive/board/ministry briefing category removed; VCH asked to identify records processable before election and provide detailed fee estimate. |

### 3. Scope narrowing across the three files

The sequence shows a progressive narrowing of the request. The first request covered five fiscal years and many detailed operational, staffing, demographic, substance-type, spending, evaluation, and governance categories. The second request reduced the time period to two fiscal years and prioritized existing summary reports. The third request narrowed the form of records further by requesting final, existing, high-level records only and excluding draft/internal correspondence, raw data extraction, custom tabulations, email searches, and working files. The July 6, 2026 narrowing reduced the period again to one fiscal year and removed a record category likely to require multi-custodian searches.

The strongest factual point for any future complaint or media package is not that VCH had no burden at all. The strongest point is that no substantive records had been produced after repeated narrowing, while fee estimates, fee-deposit requirements, refund/closure steps, and threatened s. 43 escalation dominated the correspondence.

### 4. Fee and fee-waiver observations

Key documented fee issues:

- 2025-F-355: VCH estimated 475 total locating/retrieval hours, with 472 billable hours at \$30/hour, creating a calculated billable locating/retrieval estimate of \$14,160.
- 2026-F-457: VCH issued a \$780 partial estimate for Item A only. After payment of a \$390 deposit, VCH advised that the estimate did not cover Items C and D and that one part of Item C would require an additional 30 hours (\$900), with a further estimate expected to be very large.
- Refund cheque: The 2026-F-457 file was closed and the deposit was reimbursed. VCH later advised the cheque had been mailed June 17, 2026.
- Fee waiver: The reviewed email set does not show VCH granting a fee waiver or issuing a clear written decision approving or denying waiver on both financial-hardship and public-interest grounds. Later correspondence says fee waivers have a high threshold and, for the newest file, that fee waivers can only be requested after a fee estimate is generated.

### 5. Public fee-data context

The Province of British Columbia's 2024/25 FOIPPA annual report provides context for ministry FOI fees. It reports processing fees paid across provincial ministries of approximately \$51,000 in 2020/21, \$50,000 in 2021/22, \$53,000 in 2022/23, \$54,000 in 2023/24, and \$70,000 in 2024/25. It also reports the number of requests where processing fees were paid: 144, 143, 171, 192, and 214 respectively.

This comparison must be used carefully. The provincial report covers ministries, while VCH is a health authority/public body. It also reports fees paid, not fee estimates. Still, the \$14,160 estimate for 2025-F-355 is notable contextually: it equals about 20% of the \$70,000 in processing fees paid across all ministries in 2024/25, and is roughly 43 times the average paid processing fee

per fee-bearing ministry request in 2024/25 (\$70,000 / 214 = approximately \$327).

A limited web search for published Canadian or British Columbia examples of individual FOI fee estimates at or above \$14,160 did not locate a comparable public example. The report therefore does not claim that the VCH estimate is unprecedented. A broader search did locate a U.S. federal FOIA example reported by WIRED in 2009 in which the U.S. Treasury Department sought \$522,886, so it would be inaccurate to say no such fee exists anywhere.

| Source                            | Relevant data                                                                    | URL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B.C. FOIPPA Annual Report 2024/25 | Annual processing fees paid and number of fee-bearing requests, 2020/21-2024/25. | <a href="https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/initiatives-plans-strategies/open-government/open-information/report_on_the_administration_of_foippa_2024_2025.pdf">https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/initiatives-plans-strategies/open-government/open-information/report_on_the_administration_of_foippa_2024_2025.pdf</a> |
| WIRED, Nov. 10, 2009              | Example of a much larger U.S. FOIA fee: \$522,886.                               | <a href="https://www.wired.com/2009/11/huge-foia-tab/">https://www.wired.com/2009/11/huge-foia-tab/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

## 6. Factual findings for use in an OIPC/media package

1. VCH issued an extremely large first estimate for 2025-F-355: \$14,160 based on 472 billable search/retrieval hours.
2. The applicant then narrowed the request substantially, but the second file still produced a \$780 partial estimate for only Item A.
3. After the second-file deposit was paid, VCH stated that one subpart of Item C would require an additional 30 hours and that a further estimate would be very large.
4. The second file was closed and refunded rather than producing records.
5. The third file was framed as final, existing, high-level records only, yet VCH still objected to breadth and warned of a possible s. 43 application.
6. The applicant then narrowed the current request again to one fiscal year and removed a likely high-burden executive/board/ministry briefing category.
7. No reviewed correspondence shows a granted fee waiver or a clear written fee-waiver decision addressing both inability to pay and public-interest grounds.

## Appendix: Relevant correspondence excerpts

Method note: The appendix reproduces substantive top-level correspondence only. Repeated quoted chains, routine signatures, confidentiality language, external-sender banners, and unrelated personal comments are omitted. Where Gmail returned a clipped body, the excerpt is limited to available and verified text, with fee math calculated from the visible figures.

### A. VCH FOI 2025-F-355 - Application fee (VCH, Nov. 12, 2025)

Hello,

We have received your Freedom of Information request for records and data from Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) for the period April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2025.

The request included four broad areas: A. Withdrawal Management / Detox Services; B. Overdose Data; C. Harm Reduction, Overdose Prevention, and Safer Supply; and D. Funding and Governance.

Your file number is 2025-F-355.

Application fee: A non-refundable application fee of \$10 is required for each general FOI request. Processing fees may be charged for locating, retrieving and producing the record; preparing the record for disclosure; shipping and handling; and providing a copy. There are no processing fees for the first three hours spent locating and retrieving a record or for time spent severing information from a record.

VCH advised that the statutory response time does not elapse while waiting for payment and that the file would be considered abandoned if payment was not received by December 24, 2025.

### B. VCH FOI 2025-F-355 - Request for Processing Fee (VCH, Nov. 19, 2025)

Dear Scott,

We are writing about your request dated November 12, 2025 for records and data from Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) for the period April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2025, covering Withdrawal Management / Detox Services, Overdose Data, Harm Reduction / Overdose Prevention / Safer Supply, and Funding and Governance.

We are providing you with an estimate of fees for VCH to process your request. Our fee estimate is as follows:

Locating and retrieving records:

Total 475 hours

(no charge for first 3 hours)

472 hours @ \$30 per hour = \$14,160.00

Calculated total fee estimate from visible figures: \$14,160.00.

Calculated 50% deposit from visible figures: \$7,080.00.

VCH advised that a request for fee waiver could be made under s. 75(5) if the applicant cannot afford payment, if it is fair to excuse payment for another reason, or if the records relate to a matter of public interest, including the environment or public health or safety. VCH also advised that the response period does not elapse while waiting for a fee deposit or while considering a fee waiver, and that the file would be closed if a deposit or fee-waiver request was not received within 30 working days.

### C. VCH FOI 2025-F-355 - Closure confirmation (VCH, Apr. 28, 2026)

Hello Scott,

Deadline to pay the processing fee was on December 29, 2025. We have closed this file.

You can submit a new request: Request corporate records.

### D. VCH FOI 2026-F-457 - Application fee (VCH, Apr. 28, 2026)

Hello Scott,

We have received your Freedom of Information request for the following records:

I am prioritizing existing summary reports over raw data extraction.

A. Withdrawal Management & Detox:

- Annual operating expenditures for VCH-funded detox programs, broken down by facility.

- Existing summary reports on bed occupancy, average wait times and completion rates.
- Primary substance reported at admission.

**B. Overdose Data:**

- Annual overdoses and deaths within the VCH region, including substance breakdown (specifically non-opioid substances like cocaine/methamphetamine where fentanyl was absent).

**C. Harm Reduction & Safer Supply:**

- Annual expenditures for Insite, OPS sites, safe supply initiatives, and Get Your Drugs Tested.
- Existing evaluations comparing cost-effectiveness or outcomes of detox vs. harm reduction programs.
- Total VCH FTE staff counts for harm reduction vs. detox/outreach.

**D. Funding & Governance:**

- High-level documents or briefing notes showing how funding is allocated between detox and harm reduction (e.g., funding formulas).

Timeframe: April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2024 (2 fiscal years).

Your file number is 2026-F-457.

VCH again advised of the \$10 application fee and possible processing fees.

## **E. VCH FOI 2026-F-457 - Partial processing-fee estimate (VCH, May 11, 2026)**

Hello Scott,

We are writing about your request dated April 24, 2026.

We are providing you with an estimate of fees for VCH to process item A (items 1 to 3) request. Our fee estimate is as follows:

Locating and retrieving records:

Total 27 hours

(no charge for first 3 hours)

24 hours @ \$30 per hour = \$720.00

Preparing records for disclosure and handling records:

(severing not included)

2 hours @ \$30 per hour = \$60.00

Total Fee Estimate: \$780.00

We require a 50% deposit before we will proceed with our response to your request. If you wish to proceed with your request, you can pay \$390.00.

Under s. 75(5) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, you may ask to be excused from paying all or part of the fees if: (a) you cannot afford payment or for any other reason it is fair to excuse payment; or (b) the records you are requesting relate to a matter of public interest, including the environment or public health or safety.

VCH also stated it would not be able to process Item B because substance information in overdose deaths is collected by the BC Coroners Service and is not shared with VCH. Regarding Item D, VCH asked for clarification about what services were meant by funding allocation.

## **F. VCH FOI 2026-F-457 - Additional cost after deposit (VCH, May 27, 2026)**

Dear Scott,

Thank you for your two emails and your payment of half of the fee estimate.

You are correct that the fee estimate is only for item A. We recommended that you obtain item B from BC Coroners office and we are still working on how long it would take to obtain records for items C and D. We have now confirmed that just the first part of C, will require an additional 30 hours on top of the fee estimate that we have already provided you. Unfortunately, we will have to provide a further fee estimate that will be very large.

We are trying to assist you with obtaining the records that you are seeking, however this request is very large, and it will require multiple areas to spend a large amount of time in pulling information and searching for records and in some parts, creating new documents with the data or information that is located.

As we started working on your request, we can confirm that Withdrawal Management and Detox are operated by both VCH and Providence

Health Care (PHC). We only have VCH records, you would need to go to PHC for their records. Also Get Your Drugs Tested program was not operated nor funded by VCH, therefore we do not have any records for this part of your request.

We understand that you cannot spend a lot of money on this request. We are happy to work with you to narrow your request to try to reduce the fee estimate. We could work with you to process a portion of your request with the money that you have already paid and then withdraw the rest of the request, so that you don't have to pay any further money. Is there any part of your request that you are most interested in?

### **G. VCH FOI 2026-F-457 - Closure and reimbursement (VCH, May 28, 2026)**

Hi Scott,

Thank you for your message. I'm sorry this process hasn't moved forward as you expected. Given your decision to cancel, we will proceed with closing the file. The deposit will be reimbursed by cheque mailed to your address.

We are sorry we couldn't find a workable solution and appreciate the time you invested in your request.

### **H. VCH FOI 2026-F-457 - Refund and fee-waiver context (VCH, Jun. 15, 2026)**

Scott,

The file has now been closed, and our Finance team has already started processing the refund cheque. It will be mailed to you once it has been completed.

I also wanted to provide some context regarding fee waivers under section 75 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Requests for fee waivers are assessed on a case-by-case basis and are subject to a fairly high threshold. In reviewing these requests, we need to balance the nature of the request with the time and resources required to locate, retrieve, and prepare the records. This work involves staff across different program areas and takes time away from their regular duties.

For requests based on public interest, the threshold is also quite high. In addition to showing that the topic is of public interest, there generally needs to be a clear way for the information to be shared more broadly with the public in order to demonstrate a meaningful public benefit.

I hope this helps clarify the process.

### **I. VCH FOI 2026-F-457 - Refund cheque mailing date (VCH, Jul. 2, 2026)**

Hi Scott,

I confirmed with our finance team that it was mailed out on June 17. It should be there by now or else it will be there any day now.

### **J. VCH FOI 2026-F-487 - Application fee / request acknowledged (VCH, Jun. 17, 2026)**

Hello Scott,

We have received your Freedom of Information request for final annual or quarterly dashboards, scorecards, briefing notes, reports, or tables showing withdrawal-management/detox capacity; supervised consumption, overdose-prevention, harm-reduction, outreach, and related public-health service utilization; budget, expenditure, funding allocation, or program-cost records; final briefing notes, reports, presentations, or evaluation documents provided to VCH executives, VCH board members, or ministries; and any final record, table, or report VCH already uses to compare investment, service capacity, demand, or outcomes between withdrawal-management/detox services and overdose-prevention/harm-reduction services.

The request stated: final, high-level records only; exclude draft and internal correspondence; prioritize records prepared for executives, board members, ministries, program leadership, or public reporting; identify lower-cost initial phases where possible.

Time period: April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2024.

Your file number is 2026-F-487.

VCH advised that a \$10 application fee was required and that processing fees may be charged.

### **K. VCH pre-file/scope concern for new request (VCH, Jun. 15, 2026)**

Hello Scott,

Thank you for your email with this new FOI request.

We have carefully reviewed the updated wording in comparison with the FOI request that you just withdrew. We understand that your

intention was to narrow the scope; however, based on our review, the new request does not appear to be narrower than the original request. In particular:

- The timeframe remains unchanged (April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2024), so there is no reduction in the period of records to be searched.
- The new request introduces additional types of records, such as dashboards, scorecards, tables, presentations, and briefing materials, which were not specifically included in the original request.
- The new request also adds new or broader subject areas, including service demand, service capacity, utilization, and comparative information across multiple service categories.
- Overall, the new request appears to reframe the request rather than limit it, and in some areas expands the scope of records that would need to be identified and reviewed.

This new FOI request is very large, and it will require multiple program areas to spend a large amount of time in pulling information and searching for records and in some parts, creating new documents with the data or information that is located. It will require an even greater number of hours to process due to the additional types of records and new or broader subject areas that have been included in this new FOI request.

We understand that you do not want to pay fees, however we will have to issue a large fee estimate for this request. Please confirm how you wish to proceed. Would you like us to open a new file (this would require the \$10 application fee) or would you like to narrow this new request or withdraw this request?

## **L. VCH FOI 2026-F-487 - Fee received, waiver position, s. 43 warning (VCH, Jul. 6, 2026)**

Hi Scott,

Your application fee has been received, thank you.

I reviewed your previous correspondence and files with FOI, and would like to advise you of the following regarding fee waivers:

- Fee waivers can only be requested after a fee estimate has been generated.
- Your previous request for a fee waiver was related to the file 2026-F-457. You paid a portion of the fee estimate nonetheless but later withdrew your request. We reimbursed you via cheque and closed this file. This file went to the OIPC for a review and their file has since been closed.

Please be aware that your newest request will still require extensive hours of searching and potentially interfere with VCH staff operations, particularly with the unchanged timeframe, additional records added, and new and/or broader subject areas posed. Therefore, the fee estimate for this file will be similar to or larger than the previous two requests you'd made to this office.

We advise that we are unable to process this request as it is currently worded because it is broadly worded, wide-ranging, and vague. We advise that responding to this request would unreasonably interfere with the operations of VCH. Please confirm if you would be willing to narrow the request, remove parts of the request, shorten the time frame and/or provide detail as to what specific records you are seeking.

If we do not receive clarification and narrowing of this request, we will proceed with applying to the OIPC to disregard this request under s. 43 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

## **M. Applicant narrowing reply drafted/sent July 6, 2026**

Hello Shulamie,

Thank you for your email.

In the interest of moving this request forward as quickly as possible, I am narrowing its scope as follows:

- The time period is reduced to April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024.
- I am removing the following category from the request in its entirety:

"Final briefing notes, reports, presentations, or evaluation documents provided to VCH executives, VCH board members, the Ministry of Health, or the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions concerning resource allocation, service gaps, wait times, capacity pressures, or program outcomes for the services above."

The remaining categories of the request are unchanged.

My objective is to obtain existing high-level records that can meaningfully inform public discussion regarding detox capacity, harm reduction, and related public-health services. As previously noted, these records are intended for public use during my campaign for Mayor of Vancouver, and because the municipal election is approaching in September, timely access is important.

If the remaining request is still considered too broad, please identify the specific record category or wording that is responsible for the

majority of the anticipated search effort and provide your recommended wording for a lower-cost first phase.

I also ask that VCH identify any responsive records that can reasonably be processed before the election and provide a detailed fee estimate for the remaining portions of the request, including a breakdown showing how the estimate was calculated. Once a fee estimate is issued, I ask that my request for a fee waiver be considered on both statutory grounds: financial hardship and the public interest.

I appreciate your assistance and hope we can work together to process at least the highest-priority records as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Scott Gilbert