



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Interior leaders call for secure and mandatory care at the Okanagan Correctional Centre

Gathered outside the Okanagan Correctional Centre (OCC) today, regional leaders from the Osoyoos Indian Band and the communities of Kelowna, West Kelowna, Penticton and Oliver delivered a united call for action on behalf of their communities. Their message to the Province was clear: act now to establish secure and mandatory care capacity in the Interior and advance the OCC as part of the solution. Communities cannot afford to wait.

Across the Interior, individuals with complex mental health and addiction challenges continue to cycle through emergency rooms, shelters and the justice system without receiving appropriate care. Communities expect compassion for those who are struggling, but they also expect action where individuals are at risk of harming themselves or others and are unable to seek treatment voluntarily.

As more people fall through the cracks, the impact on resources continues to grow with health, justice and public safety systems facing increasing pressure.

While secure and mandatory care initiatives have advanced elsewhere in B.C., the Interior has been waiting years for a clear path forward.

Regional leaders have consistently called for expanded treatment and recovery capacity, acknowledging that the current model is both expensive and ineffective.

Today, leaders renewed their call for the Province to make the Interior a priority and move quickly to advance the OCC to support secure and mandatory care at a scale that will have an impact. They believe the OCC represents the fastest, most practical and cost-effective path from commitment to action.

They stressed that provincial commitments must now be matched with implementation, treatment capacity and clear timelines for delivery. They also emphasized their support for a health-led model focused on treatment, stabilization and recovery for individuals whose conditions prevent them from accessing care voluntarily.

Built by the Province in 2016, the OCC is a modern facility that remains significantly underutilized. Regional leaders say it presents an immediate opportunity to expand care using existing provincial infrastructure. The group is calling on the Province to work with Indigenous communities, local governments and health partners to turn commitment into action now.

Regional Leader Quotes

Mayor Tom Dyas, City of Kelowna:

"Ahead of UBCM, we are calling on the Province to move from discussion to action. We have spent years advocating for secure and mandatory care. The need is clear, the facility is here, and communities cannot wait any longer. The Okanagan Correctional Centre is the solution our region needs to deliver treatment and recovery for those who need it most. Our health, justice and public safety systems are under increasing pressure, and we cannot continue to endure this crisis."

Chief Clarence Louie, Osoyoos Indian Band:

"Our communities are united in saying that the status quo is not working. Too many people are trapped in a cycle of addiction, mental illness, homelessness, and repeated interactions with emergency and justice systems without getting the help they need. We support a health-led approach that focuses on treatment, recovery, and dignity, and we believe the Province must act now to ensure the Southern Interior has the capacity to care for those with the most complex needs."

Mayor Martin Johansen, Town of Oliver:

"There are people in our communities who are struggling and need more support than the current system can provide. We have an opportunity to make better use of existing infrastructure at the Okanagan Correctional Centre to provide treatment, recovery, and care for those who need it most. It's a practical solution that can help improve outcomes for individuals while making our communities safer and stronger."

Mayor Julius Bloomfield, City of Penticton:

"The approval of a 10-bed detox centre in Penticton is welcome progress and reflects the strong collaboration between local leaders, health partners and the Province. At the same time, we recognize there is no single path to recovery. We must continue building a full continuum of care that includes more treatment and recovery options, as well as secure and involuntary care for those unable to access treatment voluntarily. Communities across the Southern Interior are looking for action, and we need every part of the system working together."

Mayor Victor Cumming, City of Vernon:

"Vernon has been advocating for better access to treatment and care for people experiencing complex mental health and substance-use challenges for years. Working with mayors across the Okanagan gives us a stronger regional voice as we continue to work with the Province on solutions. Together, we are advocating for regional, compassionate mandatory care for people who are unable to seek treatment voluntarily, and the Okanagan Correctional Centre presents an opportunity to help address this gap. We believe this is an important step toward providing people with the care and support they need."

Mayor Gord Milsom, City of West Kelowna

"Having a space in the Southern Interior to care for people with complex mental health challenges or long-term brain injuries is something that will help all our communities up and down the Okanagan valley. This is a priority the Province must act on now."

For more information, contact:

City of Kelowna:
Communications
250-469-8663
media@kelowna.ca

Osoyoos Indian Band:
Osoyoos Indian Band
250.498.3444
osoyoosband@oib.ca

Town of Oliver:
Town of Oliver:
250 485 6200
admin@oliver.ca

City of Penticton:
Communications
250-460-6416
communications@penticton.ca

City of Vernon:
Jessica Hewitt
Manager, Communications and Community Engagement
City of Vernon
250-558-8792

City of West Kelowna:
Ashley Stewart, Communications Manager
City of West Kelowna
778-797-2223
ashley.stewart@westkelownacity.ca