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Additional mental health crisis supports now operational in Penticton

PENTICTON — To help people in crisis and to free up police resources to focus on crime, a new crisis response team is now operational in Penticton.

The new Mobile Integrated Crisis Response (MICR) team is staffed with Interior Health (IH) mental health professionals and RCMP officers to help people in crisis who need appropriate health care services when police have been called.

“When people are in distress because of a mental-health emergency and they call police, we need to take the right steps to provide them with the care they need to stay safe and meet them where they are at,” said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “With the new Mobile, Integrated Crisis Response team in Penticton, people in crisis will be met with appropriate, compassionate and comprehensive care, and a clear path to the help they need, supporting them on their road to wellness.”

MICR health-care workers can provide immediate support and mental-health assessments to those in crisis and connect people with local resources for ongoing help. This initiative, a collaboration between local law enforcement and health services, strengthens community safety by ensuring a rapid, care-focused response to mental health emergencies.

“When police officers work alongside mental-health experts, it best serves those who are in a moment of crisis or distress,” said Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General. “By combining front-line worker’s expertise, Penticton’s MICR team is strengthening the ability to respond to public safety challenges, better protecting communities, while connecting people in crisis to the appropriate services they need, when they need them. This initiative is a crucial component of our ongoing efforts to create a safer, more inclusive province.”

“We have had ongoing discussions with the City of Penticton and RCMP about how we can work together to support individuals in crisis,” said Susan Brown, President and CEO for Interior Health. “The collective goal with our partners is to foster an inclusive, supportive, and understanding environment, where individuals who struggle with mental health or substance use feel empowered to seek help and compassion without fear of judgment or stigma.”

Expanding MICR teams is part of the Province’s Safer Communities Action Plan, and supports the plan’s goal of creating safe, healthy communities for everyone. This initiative is part of the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions’ historic \$1 billion dollar investment through Budget 2023 to urgently expand access to mental-health and addictions care, including increasing early intervention and prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery services, supportive and complex care housing, and more.

Interior Health would like to recognize and acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Dākelh Dené, Ktunaxa, Nlaka’pamux, Secwépemc, St’át’imc, Syilx, and Tšilhqot’in Nations where we live, learn, collaborate and work together.

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RCMP Superintendent Beth McAndie, Officer in Charge, Penticton Detachment Quote:

“The launch of Penticton’s Mobile Integrated Crisis Response team marks a significant milestone in our community’s commitment to innovative public safety strategies, where safety and compassion go hand in hand. By embedding the expertise of mental health professionals alongside our Integrated Crisis Response Team (ICRT) officers, we’re not just responding to crisis, but rather providing a focused strategy to support those in need. This dedicated response will ensure those experiencing a mental health crisis receive appropriate care in a timely manner and will allow frontline police officers to concentrate on investigating and proactively preventing crimes in our community.”

Penticton Mayor, Julius Bloomfield Quote:

“This is an important milestone for Penticton, as we continue to work towards a safer and more resilient community. Having this program up and running will provide support for those in crisis and also allow RCMP to focus on serious crimes. We’ve been advocating for this program over the last two years and we are very happy to see this partnership provide a much needed service to our community. We know there is more we can all do and this program can act as a prototype for future shared efforts.”

Quick facts:

- In B.C., one in five interactions with police involve someone with a mental health disorder.
- The Province has committed \$3 million to launch MICR teams in nine communities throughout B.C: Vernon's was announced on Dec. 1, 2023, Penticton’s on Jan. 22, 2024, and there are teams upcoming on the Westshore and in Prince Rupert, and Squamish, and the Lower Mainland MICR teams operating in Coquitlam/Port Coquitlam, Burnaby, Abbotsford and Chilliwack recently launched.
- Teams have previously been established in Kamloops, Kelowna, Prince George, Fort St. John, Richmond, Surrey, Vancouver, North Shore, Nanaimo and Victoria.

Learn More:

To learn more about ways the Province is making communities safer for everyone, visit:

<https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/safer-communities>

To learn about mental-health and substance-use supports in B.C., visit: <https://wellbeing.gov.bc.ca>

To see a PowerPoint presentation about the progress the Province is making in the “Building a Mental Health and Substance Use System of Care” report, visit: PowerPoint Presentation (gov.bc.ca)

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