

Mental Health

Comprehensive, evidence-based mental health care meets people where they're at and creates the conditions for everyone to be well.

HOW WE'RE THINKING ABOUT THIS

People struggling with mental health, people in crisis, or those living with mental illness are not “moral failures”—and we must not treat them as such. Mental health needs to be viewed like any other health issue—and must be properly resourced within our public system.

Mental health care in BC needs to be comprehensive, evidence-based and accessible, meeting people where they are. We will prioritize preventive and proactive care to improve mental wellbeing, while ensuring crisis and emergency services are available when needed.

When individuals who are struggling with mental health challenges seek help, they should be provided with the support that meets their specific needs. A well-functioning system must offer evidence-based, trauma-informed care.

It's also crucial that we provide adequate mental health support to frontline workers, including nurses, social workers, first responders, and mental health professionals. Burnout and exhaustion are pushing many out of these vital roles. We must take care of our colleagues on the frontlines, so they can continue delivering critical services to our communities.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

One-third of Canadians will experience a mental illness or substance use disorder in their lifetime—and 37% reported a decline in their mental health since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The toxic drug crisis, the climate emergency, the steady increase to the cost-of-living and the ongoing impacts of colonization, are all compounding trauma and grief, putting immense pressure on both individual and collective wellbeing.

Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, substance use disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and eating disorders can deeply affect an individual's quality of life. Access to comprehensive, timely and evidence-based mental health care is critical—and early intervention, such as counselling and therapy, can prevent crises before they escalate.

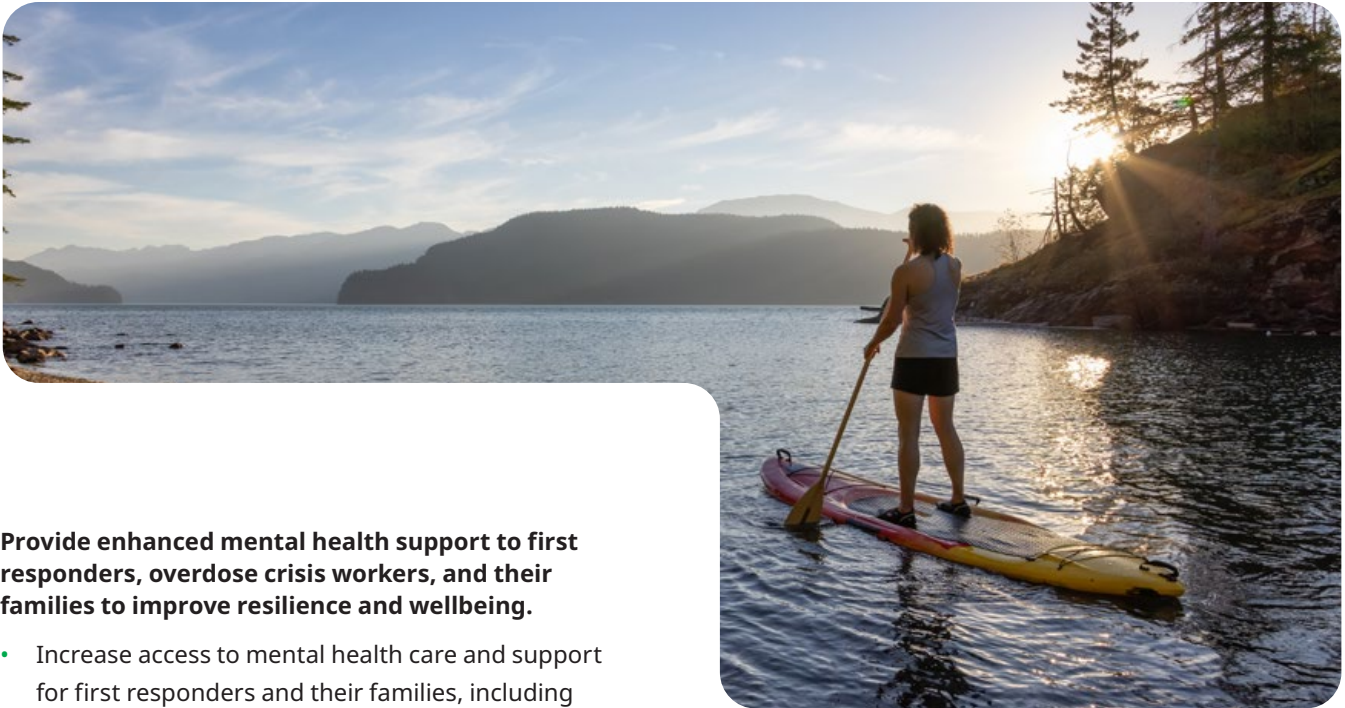
BC has some of the highest rates of self-harm and suicide in Canada, but sadly, stigma still prevents 40% of people with anxiety or depression from seeking help. Our current health and education systems are not adequately designed to promote wellbeing. Instead, it puts the majority of resources toward responding to crises, rather than preventative care.

The Mental Health Act, last updated in 1998, still authorizes coercive health measures and is out of step with modern understandings of mental health and illness. It's time for the act to be overhauled and oriented toward creating the conditions for all people to be well—informed by those who are, or have been, directly impacted by its legislation.

POLICIES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT

Ensure mental health crises are adequately addressed by emergency services and improve the integration of mental health care into emergency response systems.

- Integrate mental health as the fourth option in 911 emergency services to accommodate mental health crises that do not align with the traditional ambulance, fire or police options.
- Increase crisis line funding from \$2.5 million to \$5 million to enhance their capacity to manage diverted 911 calls, ensuring that mental health crises receive appropriate attention.
- Establish provincial leadership and invest \$500,000 to create consistent protocols for 911 operators, emergency responders, and mobile crisis teams to ensure coordinated and effective mental health crisis responses.
- Expand the PACT (Peer Assisted Care Team) program, which has been highly effective in three communities. Partner with local organizations to introduce PACTs in more communities and extend the service hours of existing teams.



Provide enhanced mental health support to first responders, overdose crisis workers, and their families to improve resilience and wellbeing.

- Increase access to mental health care and support for first responders and their families, including raising awareness about mental health tools and resources and reducing the stigma surrounding their use.
- Extend the Mobile Response Team’s psychosocial support, education, and training to peers working on the frontlines of the toxic drug crisis, ensuring that everyone impacted by critical incidents, such as overdoses, receives necessary support.

Address staffing shortages in the mental health sector by attracting and retaining skilled frontline mental health workers.

- Implement recruitment and retention initiatives, similar to those used by municipalities for primary care practitioners, including rural living allowances, health and wellness benefits, and rental options to attract frontline mental health workers.

Conduct a comprehensive review of the Mental Health Act to ensure it meets modern standards and addresses the needs of individuals with mental health challenges.

- Undertake an All-Party review of the Mental Health Act and create a parliamentary working group that will oversee the implementation of the recommendations.

Strengthen regulation and oversight of mental health care to ensure high-quality, accountable services for British Columbians.

- Create an Independent Office of the Mental Health Advocate—providing individual and systemic advocacy, aimed at improving mental health care systems in BC.
- Commit to the full regulation of psychotherapy professions, including psychologists, counsellors, therapists, and social workers, to increase public protection, provide accountability, and legitimize these essential professions.
- Collaborate with experts, including physicians, clinical psychologists, and psychiatrists, as well as individuals with lived experiences, to develop evidence-based standards of care for all mental health and substance use treatment services in BC.
- Regulate substance use treatment in BC, and ensure that any public funding for treatment comes with a requirement that the service provider gives comprehensive data and robust reporting on outcomes.

Improve the continuity of care in the mental health system and provide comprehensive support for individuals with concurrent conditions.

- Address the abrupt transition between pediatric and adult mental health care by ensuring seamless and effective connections to support services at all stages of life.
- Improve systems of care for individuals with co-occurring mental illness, substance use disorders, and brain injuries, ensuring they receive integrated and comprehensive treatment.
- Increase community-based services for individuals with eating disorders and develop stepped-care models that prioritize autonomy and self-directed recovery, with inpatient care available when necessary.

Promote early intervention in mental health care through expanded access to services and increased public awareness.

- Include six visits to a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, under the Medical Services Plan (MSP), ensuring early access to mental health support for all British Columbians.
- Build on existing anti-stigma campaigns by incorporating feedback from mental health experts, students, and people with lived experiences to promote understanding, respect, and care for people with mental health challenges.

Strengthen community-based mental health services to ensure comprehensive and accessible support for all individuals in need.

- Expand the number of community integration specialists by 50%, helping more people connect to a wide range of community-based supports and services to meet their needs.
- Work with a diverse range of community partners, including Arts and Culture, Indigenous, Health, and Education experts, to develop comprehensive arts-based and land-based therapy programs that promote healing and wellbeing.

