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New Police and Crisis Team for Kelowna

Interior Health (IH) and the Kelowna RCMP have partnered to create a Police and Crisis Team (PACT), a mobile mental health and substance use (MHSU) crisis intervention team which provides an enhanced community response to people experiencing a mental health and/or substance use crisis.

“For people who might be struggling with mental health and or substance use problems, their first interaction with emergency services is very important,” said Premier Christy Clark. “Specially-trained nurses and RCMP officers will be better able to assess someone’s needs on the scene, and create better outcomes for everyone involved.”

The PACT consists of a dedicated psychiatric nurse and a specially trained RCMP officer who patrols the streets and responds to calls. The team will assess needs and connect the person in crisis with appropriate services with a goal to reduce repeat MHSU visits to the local emergency department, as well as reduce repeat MHSU calls to the police.

“There were more than 4,000 mental health and substance use admissions to Kelowna General Hospital’s emergency department last year,” said Norm Letnick, MLA Kelowna-Lake Country. “Approximately 15 per cent of those visits were people who returned within 30 days. The new PACT will reduce these visits and provide more personalized care to some of the most vulnerable members of our community.”

“A mental health crisis can affect the entire community – our friends, neighbours and family members,” said Kelowna-Mission MLA Steve Thomson. “The new PACT team includes a dedicated psychiatric nurse and trained RCMP officer who will patrol the streets, respond to calls and help strengthen the care and supports available for people with mental health and substance use challenges in Kelowna.”

“Police recognize the value of taking the time to talk with the person in distress, to ask the right questions, and to listen,” said Supt. Brent Mundle, Officer-In-Charge of the Kelowna RCMP. “Combined with the expertise of a mental health nurse, it is anticipated this new PACT program will provide an enhanced service to people in distress and, ultimately, offer them a high degree of patience, care and compassion.”

“Having this specialized team will help reduce these re-admissions and shift care into the community setting,” said IH Board Chair John O’Fee. “This will ultimately help reduce pressures on the busiest emergency department within Interior Health and more importantly, provide immediate necessary supports and attach individuals to appropriate mental health, substance use and community resources.”

Crisis response is not the only task for the PACT team. The nurse and constable will also provide proactive support to MHSU clients receiving treatment and support, helping them to continue to access care and community-based resources before a crisis develops. The team will support discharge plans for individuals with complex MHSU disorders to help prevent re-hospitalization.

“We’re very proud to have this great partnership for Kelowna,” said City of Kelowna Mayor Colin Basran, “Mental health and substance use isn’t just a health concern, it requires the support of the entire community.”

PACT aims to provide an in-depth initial roadside triage and assessment and offer a broader range of options for resolution than straight apprehension or hospitalization. This may include referral to a family physician, services at the Community Health and Services Centre, or more urgent care provided in a hospital.

The new PACT began training earlier this month. Their first official day was Monday, March 27. In their first week on the job, they will be initiating processes to coordinate the health care of several individuals that repeatedly access the emergency department via police intervention.

Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 740,000 people living across B.C.'s vast interior. For more information, visit www.interiorhealth.ca, follow us on Twitter @Interior_Health, or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth.

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