



NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health
Victoria Police Department
Our Place

NEW OUTREACH TEAM TO HELP VICTORIA'S HOMELESS

VICTORIA – Homeless people who suffer from mental illness or addictions issues will benefit from a new, multi-agency Downtown Outreach Team in Victoria to help connect them with services including stable housing, addictions services, and vocational supports.

“This outreach team is a first for B.C. and an excellent example of how it takes partnerships across governments, health authorities and community groups to help break the cycle of homelessness,” said Health Minister George Abbott. “I commend the team and the partners on their commitment to making a difference in our communities.”

Planning for the outreach team started as a joint project between the B.C. ministries of Employment and Income Assistance, and Public Safety and Solicitor General, and the Victoria Police Department (VPD) to address common clients in an integrated way. Following the Mayor’s Task Force on Homelessness last fall, this team received additional support with staffing and resources from the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) and Our Place Society.

The Downtown Outreach Team is based on assertive community treatment (ACT) principles where a clinical team provides access to services in a community setting for clients suffering from mental illnesses or addictions. VIHA will establish at least three other teams, including another outreach team in the downtown core to help link homeless people to services and agencies, a Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) Team specifically geared to the homeless with significant criminal involvement, and an ACT Team with an intensive treatment-oriented clinical focus. The Downtown Outreach Team will share and co-ordinate resources with these teams to integrate resources and reduce barriers to improve access to services for the homeless population.

“VIHA committed \$7.6 million in additional funding in response to the Mayor’s Task Force to enhance health-care supports and services for the homeless. With our community partners, this team is an excellent start towards achieving this goal,” said Mike Conroy, chief operating officer for VIHA. “Dr. Ian Musgrave, a leading VIHA psychiatrist, will direct the four ACT/Outreach teams as clinical director. He is one of Canada’s experts on assertive community treatment and pioneered Canada’s first ACT team in Ontario.”

With a small caseload, the Downtown Outreach Team will intensively engage people who have significant mental illnesses or addictions, who do not have access to permanent housing, and who have had little or no involvement with the mental health system. The team includes:

- An outreach worker from the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance;
- A probation officer from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General;
- A psychiatrist, team leader, support worker, nurse, and program assistant from VIHA;
- Two police officers with the Victoria Police Department; and
- An outreach worker from Our Place Society.

“I am confident this team will make a significant difference on the ground through better use of our policing and social resources,” said Victoria Mayor Alan Lowe. “Giving people ongoing access to a network of social, health and housing services and supports will begin the process of making a positive difference in people’s lives.”

Street-involved and homeless individuals can end up either hospitalized or incarcerated, and continue to cycle through the system. The Mayor’s Task Force found that about 30 per cent of the homeless population in Victoria suffers concurrently from addiction and mental illness.

“Criminal law enforcement action by itself is no longer an effective strategy in dealing with the social problems in our city’s core,” said Victoria Deputy Police Chief John Ducker. “This type of integrated and innovative team approach is a better way of addressing the growing problems of homelessness, addictions and mental illness which unfortunately are becoming a larger and larger part of police caseloads. We are proud to be a key player in this project.”

“The reality for many people living on the streets today is simply finding some place to eat and sleep,” said Reverend Al Tysick, executive director for Our Place Society. “By breaking down barriers to services, this will also reduce the stigmas that the homeless face daily so these people can start to find hope again.”

The Ministry of Health has made it a priority to build a comprehensive system of mental health and addictions services across the province. A total of \$138 million of capital funding was committed to build new mental health facilities and expand existing facilities in communities across British Columbia as part of the Riverview Redevelopment Project. Mental Health and Addictions sector expenditures in 2006/07 were more than \$1.1 billion, a 30 per cent increase since 2001.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

Media contact: Marisa Adair
Communications Director
Ministry of Health
250 920-8500 (cell)
250 952-1889 (media line)

Shannon Marshall
Communications
Vancouver Island Health Authority
250 370-8270
250 361-7685 (cell)

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BACKGROUND

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DOWNTOWN OUTREACH TEAM

The Downtown Outreach Team is a multi-agency group of skilled professionals brought together to serve the homeless in the Victoria downtown core who suffer from mental illnesses and/or addictions.

The members of the Downtown Outreach Team are:

Dr. Ian Musgrave – Clinical Director of Tertiary and ACT Services for the Vancouver Island Health Authority

Dr. Musgrave is a psychiatrist and one of Canada's leading experts in the field of assertive community treatment. He is clinical director for the four ACT/Outreach teams.

Karen Bahrey – Vancouver Island Health Authority

Currently acting as team leader for the Downtown Outreach Team, Karen Bahrey has a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Victoria, and a master's degree in leadership from Royal Roads University. Since 1986, Bahrey has worked with high-risk street youth as well as youth and adults who suffer from mental health and addictions issues. Her most recent role with the Vancouver Island Health Authority was as a social programs officer.

Jae Johnson – Our Place Society

Jae Johnson has been with Our Place Society, and previously the Open Door, for over 10 years as both an outreach worker and volunteer. She looks forward to many more years supporting the street family. Johnson is an alumnus of the University of Victoria and Camosun College.

Kim Taylor – Victoria Police Department

Kim Taylor's career in policing began at the Esquimalt Police/Fire Department prior to the 2003 amalgamation of the Esquimalt and Victoria police forces when Kim became a member of the Victoria Police Department. She has served Victoria and Esquimalt as a patrol officer and as a member of the Bike/Beat Focused Enforcement Team. Raised in the Township of Esquimalt, Taylor has many hometown connections and is proud to serve as a founding member of the Downtown Outreach Team.

Brett Stewart – Victoria Police Department

In 1991, Brett Stewart graduated from the University of British Columbia with a bachelor of science degree. After university, Stewart had varied work experience, including seven years working in Youth Corrections. In December 2003, Stewart was hired by the Victoria Police Department. Following two years of patrol duty and general investigations, Stewart joined the Bike/Beat Focused Enforcement Team, which concentrates in the downtown core. During this time, Stewart has become familiar with the issues of homelessness and drug addictions.

Grace Fox – Vancouver Island Health Authority

Grace Fox is a certified resident care attendant and mental health worker and has studied addictions extensively in recent years. With 20 years of experience in mental health services from geriatrics to youth, she has worked in a wide variety of areas including youth (teenage girls) in crisis, various group home settings, and most recently with the Vancouver Island Health Authority’s Community Support Services team to help clients access and maintain housing.

Rob Horne – Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance

Rob Horne has been a drug and alcohol counselor with the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance for the past 15 years. Following his graduate studies at Camosun and Malaspina colleges, Horne has continued to enhance his education with various courses on drug and alcohol abuse and family violence. Horne joined the Downtown Outreach Team in October 2007.

Alison Hanson – Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

Alison Hanson has been a probation officer for almost two years. She began her career in Port Hardy, and joined the Downtown Outreach Team in November 2007. She graduated from the University of Alberta with a bachelor’s degree in criminology. Lending her expertise to this innovative program, Hanson is dedicated to protecting the public safety by proactively addressing criminological factors.

Shelley Thompson – Vancouver Island Health Authority

Shelley Thompson is a registered nurse and has almost 30 years of mental health nursing experience that includes working with adults, adolescents, and children. She was also a member of an assertive community treatment team in Los Angeles. With her extensive knowledge of community mental health, Thompson welcomes the opportunity to help disadvantaged and unwell people to live productive and independent lives in the community.

Media contact:	Marisa Adair Communications Director Ministry of Health 250 920-8500 (cell) 250 952-1889 (media line)	Shannon Marshall Communications Vancouver Island Health Authority 250 370-8270 250 361-7685 (cell)
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