

## PROVINCIAL ISSUES

requested amount may not be approved. The amount approved may vary from year to year. It usually takes the branch about 12 weeks to process community gaming grant applications received on or before the applicable sector deadline.

These current processes are very onerous on the organizations and place many worthwhile programs in jeopardy due to:

- the slow processes, which provide a delay in securing funding (applications can only be submitted once per annum and take 12 weeks for a response)
- uncertainty of funding, makes it difficult for organizations to adequately plan into the future
- instability of funding makes it difficult to enable pre-registration and continuity of services
- program providers have difficulties securing contract service professionals due to the uncertainty of annual programming

In her Audit of Community Gaming Grants,<sup>231</sup> delivered in December 2016, the Auditor General commented that the government needs to improve processes to better ensure funding decisions are consistent and well documented. Program guidelines need clarification and updating and she concluded that it is time for the government to re-assess whether the program design makes sense. While the report did make several recommendations for improvement it only addressed one year grants and did not comment on the duration of grant approval periods. Allowing approval of longer-term agreements would increase efficiency by reducing the number of annual re-assessments.

### THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government implement a process whereby:

1. Approved charitable and non-profit programs with longer-term programming needs can apply for up to 3-year funding commitments, distributed annually; and
2. The organization would still be subject to annual reporting of their compliance before receiving the subsequent annual grant.

**Submitted by the Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Langley Chamber of Commerce**

**The Policy Review Committee supports this resolution**

## **58. SAFE COMMUNITIES AND STRONG ECONOMIES – MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS IN B.C.**

### **Opening Statement**

Mental illness and addiction affect one in five people across Canada, significantly affecting business and the economy. Further, un- or under-treated mental illnesses and addictions are pervasive within the homeless population, which can lead them to present in anti-social ways, affecting public safety that can, in turn, affect local business. In addition, un- or under-treated mental illnesses and addictions complicates the transition of homeless into permanent housing and can lead to recidivism in offenders, increasing the costs of social housing and to our justice system.

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<sup>231</sup> <http://www.bcauditor.com/pubs/2016/audit-community-gaming-grants>

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### Background

These consequences of un- and under-treated mental illnesses and addictions are substantive, and can present themselves as rising levels of homelessness and crime, lost productivity, policing costs, and government spending. The report, [The Life and Economic Impact of Major Mental Illnesses in Canada 2011-2041](#), estimates that cost of mental illness alone in Canada was \$48.6 billion in 2011. The [Centre for Additions and Mental Health](#) lists the costs to our society, which include - on any given week - at least 500,000 employed Canadians are unable to work due to mental health problems and between 23 and 67 percent of homeless people report having a mental illness.

In B.C., the Ministry of Health spends more than \$1.5 billion per year in mental health and substance use services and the Ministry of Children and Family Development approximately \$94 million a year to address child and youth mental health and substance use challenges in B.C.<sup>232</sup> Specific to illicit drug use, the Provincial Health Officer declared a public health emergency April 2016, due to the significant spike in [drug overdose deaths](#).

The provincial government estimates that it costs our economy \$6.6 billion annually in lost productivity due to mental illness and addiction.<sup>233</sup> Further, the costs of increased policing – typically the first responder when someone becomes unstable or dangerous - is largely borne by businesses through high non-residential property tax rates, which in some regions can be five or more times residential. There are also costs that businesses must pay to ensure the safety of their clients and continuity of their businesses.

The Chamber appreciates that the Government of B.C. has also made it a priority to build a comprehensive system of mental health and substance-use services across the province. We are aware that the Ministry of Health has made investments totalling approximately \$1.42 billion in 2014/15, equating to an increase of 67 percent over the 2000/01 total of \$851.4 million. We can see that the provincial government has clearly taken many steps to address mental health and addictions issues across the province over the last three years, steps that include more funding, additional space, and capital investments.

On July 27, 2016, the Government of B.C. established a Joint Task Force on Overdose Response that is headed by Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall and Clayton Pecknold, B.C.'s director of police services. The Task Force has representatives from the health and public safety sectors including B.C.'s Chief Coroner, representatives from RCMP "E" Division, the Vancouver Police Department and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority.<sup>234</sup>

The Task Force has identified priority areas such as better mental and emotional support for people who work on the front lines; expanded rapid access to opioid substitution treatment and the continuum of care; expanded and targeted law-enforcement strategies for fentanyl and carfentanil; continued expansion of access to naloxone; enhanced laboratory capacity and further support for the BC Coroners Service.

Although B.C. has increased mental health and addictions treatment resources, helping countless individuals, families, businesses, and communities, the issues related directly and indirectly to un- or under-treated mental illnesses and addictions are still on the rise, as are overdose deaths. B.C. currently has the highest per capita spending on mental health and addictions in Canada at \$230 per capita<sup>235</sup> and yet the service demand is still not met.

The Chamber is confident the provincial government will continue to make priority investments in mental health and addictions, but questions whether the current service delivery model is effective.

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<sup>232</sup> [BC Government Fact Sheet: Comprehensive mental health and substance use services in B.C.](#)

<sup>233</sup> [Healthy Minds, Healthy People: A Ten-Year Plan to Address Mental Health and Substance Use in British Columbia](#)

<sup>234</sup> [Opioid Overdose: British Columbia's Public Health Emergency, Written Submission House of Commons Standing Committee on Health \(October 6, 2016\)](#)

<sup>235</sup> [Mood Disorders Society of Canada Quick Facts: Mental Illness and Addictions in Canada \(2<sup>nd</sup> Edition\)](#)

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For example:

- Access to mental health and addiction services in rural/remote communities remains an issue for a variety of reasons, including a shortage of trained staff.
- There appears to be a lack of coordination between the Ministry of Health and BC Housing, which exacerbates the difficulty of providing housing, allowing individuals to slip through the cracks and end up back on the streets.
- There appears to be a “cherry-picking” approach to addressing un- or under-treated mental illnesses and addictions, largely flowing from funding streams and political priorities e.g. resources tied to a specific gender, age, ethnic profile and/or a specific diagnosis. This can reduce access for those suffering as well as complicate the overall bureaucracy.
- There is no single lead organization at the provincial-level, and as such, [service providers](#), e.g. social housing (emergency, supportive, etc), justice/law enforcement, health/mental health/sexual health, income/employment, often work in silos and compete for funding, further challenging an already complex situation.
- Recidivism for offenders as well as evictions from social housing are predominantly due to un- or under-treated mental illnesses and addictions, yet are managed by those in the justice system and by social housing providers rather than trained health care providers.

### THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government ensures a sustainable, systematic approach to mental health and addictions prevention and treatment through:

1. Commissioning an expedited study – funded in BC Budget 2018 if not sooner - to re-design the current service model to include:
  - a. identifying a lead provincial agency to coordinate treatment programs across the province for un- or under-treated mental illnesses and addiction;
  - b. ensuring regional integrated teams are properly resourced to provide effective and assertive treatment and outreach; and
  - c. support and develop intervention in early and evolving mental health and substance use issues; and
2. Ensuring the work of the Joint Task Force on Overdose Response continues and is appropriately funded.

**Submitted by the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce and the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce**

**Supported by the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce, the Chilliwack Chamber of Commerce, the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, the Mission Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce and the Mackenzie Chamber of Commerce**

**The Policy Review Committee supports this resolution**