

REPORT

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ENGINEERING SERVICES OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council **Date:** July 7, 2025

From: Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer **File:** Doc#2714565

Lisa Leblanc, Director, Engineering Services and Deputy CAO

Jackie Teed, Director, Planning and Development

Item #: 2025-206

Subject: Crises Response Pilot Project: Q2 2025 update

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *THAT the two year pilot project be extended to December 31, 2026 based on existing funding;*
 2. *THAT staff be directed to apply for Health Canada's Emergency Treatment Fund for two additional years. Report back to Council with the outcome of the grant submission; and*
 3. *THAT staff provide a further update to Council in Q4 2025.*
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PURPOSE

This report is to provide Council with an update on the progress and key developments of the Crises Response Pilot Project.

BACKGROUND

The City of New Westminster is working to establish compassionate, innovative, and goal-driven ways to address the three interconnected crises of homelessness, mental health and substance use. These complex crises are impacting the community, including through the suffering of those directly experiencing the three crises, as well as those who are dealing with the associated unintended effects, also referred to as externalities.

In September 2024 the City of New Westminster launched the Crises Response Pilot Project, meant to address homelessness, mental health and substance use. This pilot champions and advances bold, proactive, responsive and strategic organizational approaches to be used sustainably long-term.

The Crises Response Pilot Project includes three interdepartmental City teams: the Operations Support Team, the Crises Response Outreach Team, and the Policy and Advocacy Team. Each team has an update as an attachment to this report.

A. CRISES RESPONSE OUTREACH TEAM UPDATE

The Crises Response Outreach Team is made up of experienced outreach workers who provide support to those experiencing homelessness, mental health and substance use. As stated in previous update reports, the City staff who make up this team provide referrals to provincial teams, as well as to faith-based and not-for-profit partners in the community. They are also able to receive referrals. This team champions the needs of Indigenous peoples who have living experience, while working to identify how the City can provide a culturally safe and trauma-informed response. This team operates Monday to Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM, excluding holidays. Like the Community Liaison Officer Program, they can be contacted through the One Number to Call: Community Support Line at 604-527-4502.

Between January 2025 and April 2025, the Crises Response Outreach Team has had 551 client interactions and has made 1,434 referrals. In the same time frame, they have received 25 referrals, and responded to two toxic drug overdoses.

This team continues to solidify itself as one of the ways to bridge the gap between those experiencing homelessness, mental health and/or substance use, and those who provide services, assistance and resources like housing, identification, and access to a spectrum of treatment. This work is always done from a person-centred, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive lens: those the Crises Response Outreach Team serves are always informed of their options while building trust and relationships with the individuals who may need their assistance.

Along with providing support in navigating such systems, the team also regularly makes itself available through community drop-in programs. Sessions are hosted at the New Westminster Public Library's main branch, and also at the Queensborough Community

Centre. At these drop-ins, individuals can connect directly with outreach workers to access resources and services, receive transportation support, meet basic needs like obtaining access to food, water, and warming or cooling kits, and also through the provision of assistance when looking to complete applications for housing, identification, and income or disability assistance. Unique to the Queensborough drop-in sessions are the opportunity to receive a hot meal, provided in partnership with the local Gurdwara, and access to a free shower program.

B. OPERATIONS SUPPORT TEAM UPDATE

The Operations Support Team mainly focuses on safety and cleanliness, while also addressing the other impacts of the three crises on businesses and residents. Included in this team is the Community Liaison Officer Program, and the recently established One Number to Call: Community Support Line. The Community Liaison Officer Program can be contacted through the One Number to Call: Community Support Line at 604-527-4502.

Knowing that City staff can sometimes be negatively impacted due to effects tied to the three crises, this group works to ensure City staff's issues are addressed; examples include ensuring compliance with the City's obligations under collective agreements and WorkSafeBC, as well as providing compassionate response training for City staff. There are at least five kinds of training that staff can take; these courses are designed to provide responses that take into account considerations related to the three crises. Examples include Resilient Minds® – Building the Psychological Strength of Community Workers, Workplace Violence Prevention and De-escalation, and Homelessness 101.

It has taken coordinated and strategic interdepartmental cooperation and teamwork to ensure areas of concern remain clean to the best of the City's ability. Highly coordinated information sharing through regular Operations Support Team meetings helps staff review areas and tasks of note while addressing concerns. As an example, the Engineering Operations team may receive a call from the Community Liaison Officer Program about drug paraphernalia in the community. Engineering Operations regularly works with a third-party contractor to safely dispose of biohazardous waste.

Further addressing respect, cleanliness and enjoyment for public spaces is work being done through the offering of a 24/7 trailer with attendant services, as well as showers, sinks and toilets. The trailer, which is fully funded by BC Housing, receives an average of 1,300 visits monthly. This trailer replaced a portable toilet that the City had provided and placed in the same location. City staff continue to work on a Citywide Toilet Strategy, with an update last provided to Council on May 5, 2025. One of the identified priority groups includes those who are experiencing homelessness. Staff working on the Citywide Toilet Strategy will ensure alignment with the objectives of the Crises Response Pilot Project.

The activation and animation of public spaces encourages everyone to stay and enjoy what New Westminster has to offer. The improvements to the Fourth Street Stairs will

include a flex space at the east end of the Front Street Mews; construction should be completed by fall 2025.

The Community Liaison Officer Program adds another layer of eyes and ears on the street. Community Liaison Officers have established regular check-in areas of note; these are monitored as appropriate as they are shared with the team or reported through the One Number to Call: Community Support Line. Community Liaison Officers are proud to do their work with empathy and compassion, and in many cases gain voluntary compliance or cooperation when making requests to take down a tent or structure, or when asking people to remove belongings from sidewalks or emergency exits. Between February 2025 and May 2025, Community Liaison Officers have proactively and reactively responded to 815 contacts.

After feedback from a number of community partners, including those in New Westminster's business community, staff working on the Crises Response Pilot Project were able to successfully establish the One Number to Call: Community Support Line. The phone number eliminates the guesswork for businesses and residents in the community who would like to report concerns related to the three crises, but are unsure of where to start. The number is 604-527-4502 and is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

C. POLICY AND ADVOCACY TEAM UPDATE

The Policy and Advocacy Team works to obtain funding and other resources to fill the needs and gaps in the provision of services and strategies to address the three crises. This team establishes and maintains relationships with senior levels of government, while also sharing with various members of the community the different ways in which they can help to push this pilot forward.

A major highlight in the work done by this team includes the City of New Westminster's successful Emergency Treatment Fund application. The application was submitted to Health Canada in November 2024; the City learned in early 2025 it would be receiving \$1.47M to support work being done for the Crises Response Pilot Project. The City of New Westminster was the only successful BC applicant and the only municipality in BC to receive funding through this fund. This funding covers approximately 70% of the City's initial \$2.2M investment in this pilot.

To underscore urgency and focus, the Policy and Advocacy Team worked to establish the 2024 Crises Response Pilot Project Roadmap, endorsed by Council in February 2025. This roadmap includes recommendations from two plans: the Five-Year Prevention, Support and Transition Services Plan and Supportive Housing and Wrap-Around Services Plan, and the Ten-Year Supportive Housing and Wrap-Around Services Plan. The team has also made significant advancements on five out of the eight priority actions from the 2025 Roadmap.

Mirroring the spirit of collaboration and cooperation among City staff, this team works with a variety of groups outside of the City to refine and improve the pilot; examples include business improvement associations, residents' associations, not-for-profit groups, and faith-based groups. Two Working Groups have helped to shape responses that are realistic, compassionate and sustainable.

This group is also responsible for coordinating the retention of an independent evaluator. The independent evaluator is from Douglas College and presented her metrics for assessment to Council in April 2025. Evaluations are expected to be produced for August 2025, and at the end of the project's two-year mark in August 2026.

Communications regarding the Crises Response Pilot Project is also a priority item. While all three teams take part in information sharing with the community, the Policy and Advocacy Team is the main group responsible. This group regularly assesses media and resources to ensure they include the most up-to-date information about the pilot; examples include the City's Crises Response Pilot Project web page and compact physical cards that include a range of important numbers to contact in the context of the pilot.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The term of the City's Crises Response Pilot Project ends August 2026. As noted above, Health Canada's Emergency Treatment Funding is covering approximately 70% of the City's \$2.2M funding investment in this Pilot. Moreover, some of the original positions have not been filled, resulting in some surplus funding. The surplus funding enables the existing Pilot to continue to December 2026.

Also, City staff will be applying for two additional years of funding under Health Canada's Emergency Treatment Fund when the Federal Government's grant intake process is open. If successful, this will extend the Crises Response Pilot Project to 2028.

Staff will report back to Council regarding the funding status with the Emergency Treatment Fund.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The Crises Response Pilot Project is a high-priority initiative, with several City departments involved: Community Services, Engineering Services, Fire and Rescue Services, Human Resources, Library Services, Office of the CAO, Parks and Recreation, Planning and Development and Police Services.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. THAT the two year pilot project be extended to December 31, 2026 based on existing funding.
2. THAT staff be directed to apply for Health Canada's Emergency Treatment Fund for two additional years. Report back to Council with the outcome of the grant submission.
3. THAT staff provide a further update to Council in Q4 2025.
4. THAT Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommends Options 1, 2 and 3.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Crises Response Team Update

Attachment 2: Operations Support Team Update

Attachment 3: Policy and Advocacy Team Update

APPROVALS

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