

REPORT

Peer Assisted Crisis Team Working Group

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** February 14, 2022

From: Peer Assisted Crisis Team (PACT) Working Group **File:** 05.1035.10

Item #: 2022-107

Subject: Peer Assisted Crisis Team (PACT) Pilot Project Update

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the community engagement plan for the PACT Pilot Project conducted in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association;

That Council approve the hiring of a Project Coordinator, Crisis Care Reform to support the PACT Pilot Project; and

That Council approve the change in name of the Working Group to the Peer Assisted Crisis Team (PACT) Working Group.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the Peer Assisted Crisis Team (PACT) Working Group's progress to date as well as approve the community engagement plan for Phase One, the hiring of a support staff to help facilitate the project and to rename the Working Group to more accurately reflect the work plan.

SUMMARY

Phase One of the PACT Pilot Project is currently underway, working in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). This report outlines the plan for implementation of Phase One as well as next steps. The approval of the community engagement plan is recommended as well as hiring a staff resource to support the facilitation of the project in order to build internal capacity and help implement the plan.

The Working Group would also like to rename the group to the Peer Assisted Crisis Team (PACT) Working Group to more accurately reflect the work plan.

Staff and the PACT Working Group continue to work with the Province to help secure funding for Phase Two of the five year pilot project.

BACKGROUND

Council is committed to developing a compassionate response to those experiencing mental health crisis and poverty across the city. We know we need to be bold to take steps to lift up the most vulnerable, especially those experiencing mental health crisis, poverty, and homelessness. We also know that we need different approaches to domestic and sexual violence. There is a need for a suite of community responses to mental health crisis that prioritizes compassionate care.

On February 1, 2021 Council passed a resolution at a Regular Council meeting supporting the transition from primarily a police response to a health response to mental health crisis in the community.

Police Reform Working Group Deliverables

In order to begin taking action in the community, in March 2021, Council approved the following direction, based on the input from the Reconciliation, Inclusion and Engagement Task Force:

- a. Provide direction on three engagement approaches identified.
- b. Establish a new "Police Reform Working Group" comprised of small group of Councillors, city staff and industry experts.
- c. Provide direction on the question of community representation on the Police Reform Working Group.
- d. Identify that research be included in this report as part of the mandate of the proposed "Police Reform Working Group".

Council led the Police Reform Working Group, comprised of Councillor Nadine Nakagawa (chair), Councillor Jaimie McEvoy and Councillor Mary Trentadue as well as staff, and prepared a submission in April 2021, to the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act (and Mental Health Act). The submission called for policing and public safety to be restructured in accordance with the city's values and called for greater municipal change.

The submission acknowledged:

"...No amount of change to the BC Police Act or Mental Act alone can replace the need for greater structural change that would reduce the criminalization of poverty or social condition due to deficits in coordinated, region-wide approaches to housing, healthcare and community services."

The recommendations for change is anticipated to help amplify and center the voices of racialized, indigenous, homeless and vulnerable members of our community who have been living at the intersection of historical and systemic marginalization.

Starting from a place of compassion and inclusion, everyone in our city should have a sense of place, to have a home, and to enjoy access to food, integrated health services and full employment with a livable income. Council advocated for the decriminalization of drugs, and that the sources of poverty and desperation are addressed at their cause. There should be strong, intergovernmental collaboration within a sustainable and regenerative environment.

Developing a Community Led Response to Mental Health Crisis (PACT Pilot Project)

The city, along with its partners and key stakeholders, plan to develop an effective community response to mental health crisis. Key crisis drivers include shelter / housing issues, food security, family conflict, alcohol / substances, depression / anxiety, loss and minor physical injuries.

In BC, police officers are often the frontline responders to mental health crises. Due to legislation and a lack of voluntary health and social services, people experiencing a mental health crisis are typically transported by police to only one of two options: hospital emergency rooms or the prison system. Neither is well-equipped to address the complex issues that led to the crisis.

On November 1, 2021, Council approved the city's participation in the Peer Assisted Crisis Team (PACT) Pilot Project in New Westminster with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and the City of Victoria, North Vancouver and the District of North Vancouver; \$65,000 toward the implementation of Phase 1 of the Peer Assisted Crisis Team Pilot Project in New Westminster; and a submission to the Province of British Columbia Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant Program for up to \$94,000.

The City of New Westminster is now working with CMHA to enact the PACT Pilot Project which will be comprised of mobile crisis teams responding to mental health calls from the community. Based on North American best practices and staffed by peer and mental health specialists, the PACT Pilot Project will provide support and connection to a range of services such as mental health, housing, treatment, benefits, and employment. PACT is an alternative or auxiliary service to police response to crisis calls related to mental health. The intention is to move from an incarceration approach to a health response to mental health crisis.

Key PACT Components:

- Pairs a mental health professional with a trained peer crisis responder.
- Expands the range of mental health supports to City of New Westminster residents, co-designed with populations at higher risk of experiencing distress that may lead to police contact.

- Intends to keep people living with mental illness and substance use and their families connected to their communities and voluntary mental health services.

ANALYSIS

Over the next year, the city and CMHA will implement Phase One and plan for Phase Two of the PACT Pilot Project. The first phase is currently underway and will prepare, through engagement and community planning, for a five year pilot project, pending support of senior levels of government. The PACT Working Group will provide guidance and oversight for the implementation.

PACT Working Group Phase One Work Plan:

1. Identify the service gaps in mental health support in New Westminster.
2. Understand and map the current services for our most vulnerable populations.
3. Establish a community developed implementation plan for the five year PACT Pilot Project.
4. Cultivate champions and an understanding of the project with key groups across the city.

Engagement Plan

CMHA will lead the engagement process and is in the process of finalizing staff/consultants to complete the work. The implementation of the plan is intended to begin within the next few weeks. The engagement plan for Phase One is recommended to be as follows:

A. Develop a Systems Partner Planning Table

This table will be established to oversee the resources and strategic alignment of senior government partners to ensure the integrated implementation of this project. The intention is to create an ongoing sustainable plan with a long term funding source and allocation of resources to accommodate the implementation of the plan recommended by the Community Planning Table (described below).

The Stakeholders at this table are recommended to include:

- Fraser Health Authority
- CMHA
- BC Housing
- New Westminster Police Department
- City of New Westminster
- First Nations Health Authority

- Local Members of the Legislative Assembly and Member of Parliament
- Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction Staff
- Public Safety Staff
- E-Comm Staff

B. Develop a Community Planning Table

The Community Planning Team will be established to determine how to best structure this project to meet the needs of residents of New Westminster, to align with service providers and serve vulnerable and marginalized populations most effectively. Some may be invited to attend monthly meetings while others may be consulted individually. CMHA will consult or consider each group to ensure the best use of limited resources.

The Stakeholders at this table are recommended to include:

- Spirit of the Children
- W.I.N.G.S. - Women in Need Gaining Strength
- The Lower Mainland Purpose Society
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
- Lookout Housing and Health Society
- Greater Vancouver Food Bank
- Seniors Services Society
- First Nations Bands
- Union Gospel Mission
- Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral
- New Westminster Homelessness Coalition
- Family Services
- Immigrant Services Society / Mosaic
- People with lived and living experience

C. Engage Key Stakeholder Groups: consult, inform and develop champions

The following groups will be consulted by members of the PACT Working Group. The intention is to create understanding and encourage champions throughout New Westminster.

The groups identified to date include:

- Division of Family Practice
- Holy Trinity Anglican Church
- St. Barnabas and Shiloh Unity Church and other faith based organizations
- Downtown Residents Association
- Downtown Business Improvement Association
- Uptown Business Improvement Association

- Tourism New Westminster
- New Westminster Chamber of Commerce
- BC Ambulance Service
- New Westminster Fire Rescue
- New Westminster Police Department
- TransLink Police
- Health Justice Organization
- Black Lives Matters
- Sanctuary Health

A report will be presented to Council once Phase One is completed. Staff and the PACT Working Group are recommending the support of the engagement plan to develop Phase One of the PACT Pilot Project.

D. Build Internal Capacity to support the PACT Pilot Project

On November 1, 2021 Council approved funding to support the PACT Pilot Project and to work with CMHA in developing Phase One of the plan with the community. Staff, the PACT Working Group and CMHA are recommending the resources allocated by Council be amalgamated to create a staff support position, the Project Coordinator, Crisis Care Reform, in the Intergovernmental Relations office.

This position will support the implementation of Phase One of the PACT Pilot Project. This investment will continue to build internal knowledge, expertise and capacity as the project moves from the planning phase into the five year PACT Pilot Project.

A funding submission to the BC Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant Program was submitted to offset the costs incurred for Phase One.

E. Next Steps

The next steps for this project include:

1. **CO-DEVELOP** a model for a civilian-led mobile crisis response team to the City of New Westminster based on the input from the Systems and Community Planning Tables and the findings from the stakeholder engagement.
2. **PROCURE** community agency to operate the service through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. The Community Planning Tables will nominate a subcommittee to review the proposals and make recommendations on the final decision (subject to provincial funding).
3. **IMPLEMENT** Phase Two, a Five Year PACT Pilot Project which includes mobile crisis teams activated across the city to respond to mental health crisis.

Name Change of the Working Group

In February 2021, Council approved the Police Reform Working Group in order to prepare a submission to the Provincial Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act. From that submission, the work has now transitioned to create the Peer Assisted Crisis Team Pilot Project in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association. This work will support as well as provide an alternative to police response for those experiencing mental health crisis.

Staff and the Working Group are requesting a name change from the Police Reform Working Group to the PACT Working Group to more accurately reflect the work plan.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

This project will work toward improving the livability and quality of life for all residents and businesses in the city. The intention is to make the best use of limited resources across many levels of government, including the decreased reliance on police for mental health crisis and hospital emergency rooms. The intention of the plan is to build sustainable resources, from across many organizations, available to the community.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The anticipated cost of the PACT Pilot Project will be within previously approved Council funding of \$65,000. A submission to the Province of British Columbia Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant Program, if successful, will offset costs incurred for Phase One.

CMHA will provide community consultation expertise and project management staff to facilitate Phase One. The city and CMHA continue to work with the Province to secure Phase Two funding for the and the three pilot cities (Victoria, New Westminster and North Shore).

OPTIONS

1. Council approve the community engagement plan for the PACT Pilot Project conducted in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association;
2. Council approve the hiring of a Project Coordinator, Crisis Care Reform to support the PACT Pilot Project;
3. Council approve the change in name of the Working Group to the Peer Assisted Crisis Team (PACT) Working Group; or

4. That Council provide other direction.

Staff recommend options 1, 2 and 3.

CONCLUSION

Phase One of the PACT Pilot Project is currently underway in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association. This report outlined the plan for implementation of Phase One. The approval of the community engagement plan is recommended as well as hiring a staff resource to support the facilitation of the project in order to build internal capacity and help implement the plan. A name change of the Working Group to the PACT Working Group is also recommended.

Staff, the PACT Working Group and CMHA continue to work with the Province to help secure funding for Phase Two of the five year pilot project.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
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