



Memo to Council

Date: July 25, 2023

Subject: Mental Health Distress or Crisis Support – Motion Served by Councillor Lubik

Motion Served

Notice of the following motion was provided at the July 11, 2023, Regular Council meeting:

THAT staff collaborate with the City of Coquitlam staff to organize an expression of interest for a regional Peer Assisted Community Team to support those in mental health distress or crisis, including stakeholder discussions and a letter of support.

Background

In the last two years the Canadian Mental Health Association has funded three pilot Peer Assisted Community Teams (PACT) teams in [New Westminister](#), Victoria, and the [North Shore](#). These have been incredibly successful, such that the province recently announced three more sites across the province, and will soon be taking expressions of interest for four additional teams.

“We know when a person is experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, what they need and want, is the support from someone who knows what they are going through. That is the heart of the Peer Assisted Care Team (PACT) model... A community-led care response, informed by people with lived and living experience, operated by local organizations is part of the transformation we need.”- Jonathan Morris, CEO, Canadian Mental Health Association, BC.

The teams are not a new concept, with variations of the work being conducted in Toronto, Edmonton, Eugene, Ore., New Zealand, and Sweden. The addition of the PACTs to B.C.’s continuum of mental health care has not been controversial.

CMHA, in partnership with the province, is leading and advocating for mobile civilian response to mental health crisis calls known as PACT. The aim of a PACT is to provide an alternative to police and shift BC’s crisis care to a community-led, client-centered, trauma-informed, culturally safe, response centered on the mental health and well-being of the affected individual, their family, and their community.

PACT can respond to situations such as:

- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide,

- Family members experiencing challenges,
- Substance use,
- Social isolation and loneliness,
- Fear, anxiety and depression, and, but not limited to,
- Other mental health-related emergencies.

PACTs can help by:

- Offering support to an individual or their loved one over the phone or in-person.
- Providing crisis counselling and de-escalation.
- Facilitating connections to the appropriate resources, services and supports in the community to meet an individual's underlying needs.
- Providing advocacy and accompaniment to emergency departments, police stations, or community organizations.

A recent news article looked at the effectiveness of such teams:

Teams are getting hundreds of calls that the police are not attending or are not called for. Across all three PACTs, the call load reached 500 between January and April, with police simultaneously present at six of the calls. There were only two calls where the teams required police to attend because of a risk to PACT members' safety.

Eight calls were referred to the PACTs by police or the fire department.

Data from the NRPD shows an interesting pattern has developed this year since PACT began operating in January. The number of apprehensions police made under the Mental Health Act between January and May was 99.

That is a significant drop from the same period in 2022 (146) and 2021 (192). Match those 99 apprehensions against the 120 calls that PACT responded to over five-and-a-half months and the reaction from Leaver comes in three words: "That's good news."

The request to council, which comes at the request of the Homelessness and Housing Task Group, is for staff to work with the city of Coquitlam, who are leading who are leading the organization of an expression of interest for one of the next for pilots for PACTs. This would include a letter of support from Council. There is interest and willingness from the other communities, as well as service providers.

These programs are not run by local governments and funding is not required from the city.

In conversations with Task Force members, representatives from CMHA have shared that the Tri-Cities may be well placed to as a potential site, working across local governments with a track record of collaboration, having diverse policing services, and most importantly, we know that there is need in our community.

Council Strategic Priorities

This request aligns with the council priority of Enhance Community Wellbeing: Incorporate our values, including diversity, equity, inclusion, Truth and Reconciliation, and climate action, into our policies, plans, and initiatives.

Council Options

The following options are available for Council consideration:

1. Receive for information.
2. Refer to staff for a report back on the feasibility of the proposed motion considering budget, alignment with Council's Strategic Priorities, and work plan implications, including but not limited to operational capacity, policy, legality, etc.
3. Other.