

Policing in a Time of Dual Crisis: The Victoria & Vancouver experience

Inspector Conor King

Victoria Police Department

◆ Historically BC's response to the overdose crisis has been an interlaced effort:

HEALTH/SOCIAL services which provide: public health, harm reduction, treatment, counselling, housing...

and

POLICE which provide: public safety/crime prevention & drug supply disruption...

◆ As these efforts are interlaced – they were both effected by Covid-19.

Covid-19 and the loss of support, housing and services exposed and exacerbated the already difficult situation facing marginalized people: people who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness, people with substance use disorder & people coping with mental illness.

The public experienced both actual and perceived increase in crime and disorder.

Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions: Physical distancing & self-isolation.

- Closure of Overdose Prevention Sites & Supervised Consumption Sites or reduced hours and staffing.
(for example – InSite in the Downtown East Side reduced its booths from 24 to 6)
 - The number of people accessing OPS/SCS dropped by 50% in April / May 2020.
 - Province wide - in 2019 there were 853,619 OPS visits. In 2020 there were 570,619.
(Min of Mental Health Addictions - Feb 2021)
- Single Room Occupancy (SR0) hotels prohibited sharing of rooms and invoked ‘No Guest’ policies.
 - Reduced the positive effect of “buddying – to avoid using drugs alone”
- Reductions in supportive housing capacity, drop-in centers and shelter bed availability.

Victoria's Our Place closes some facilities due to COVID-19

CTV Vancouver Island

[CTV News Vancouver Island](#) Staff

[@CTVNewsVI](#) | [Contact](#)

Published Tuesday, March 17, 2020 1:59PM PDT

Last Updated Tuesday, March 17, 2020 4:18PM PDT



Victoria's Our Place homeless support centre is shutting down some of its facilities to comply with the B.C. government's guidelines on how to manage COVID-19.

In total, Our Place is temporarily closing down its drop-in space, hygiene area, clothing area, computer lab and courtyard.

The support centre is also reworking some of its shelter space to comply with the province's call for social distancing.

"It's heartbreaking for us to limit access to so many vulnerable people, but it's the only way we can meet the province's new pandemic regulations," said Grant McKenzie, communications director of Our Place.

Additionally, Our Place will be closing its seasonal shelter as of Wednesday, March 18, and will limit the number of people who can access shelter mats at First Met and My Place to ensure there is enough space for social distancing.





COVID-19 News

BC Coroners Service investigating death of 37-year-old man at Pandora Ave homeless camp

By **Brishti Basu** - April 21, 2020

[f](#) Facebook[t](#) Twitter[r](#) Reddit[✉](#) Email

(Homeless camp along Pandora Ave/Photo by Margaret MacQuarrie - Facebook)

Sponsored

Google

View this ad

Report this ad? ▶

TOPAZ PARK - VICTORIA



LATEST NEWS

Pilot fatigue, poor weather played role in float-plane crash that killed four, says safety board

Two men found dead at Topaz Park, site of encampment for homeless

Cindy E. Harnett / Times Colonist

APRIL 22, 2020 07:31 PM



Tents at Topaz Park in Victoria, where many people who don't have homes are staying during the pandemic.
Photograph By ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

COVID-19 Impact – Overdose deaths in Victoria

- In the five weeks before the Covid-19 restrictions – ZERO fatal overdoses.
- In the eleven weeks after Cov-19 restrictions – 36 fatal overdoses.

Global News Hour at 6 BC

Illegal drug market is busted outside Victoria City Hall



DOWNTOWN CRIME

Illegal drug market busted outside Victoria city hall

Two downtown Victoria stabbings 5 minutes apart raise concerns

August 11, 2020 [UPDATED](#)



Victoria elementary school families concerned after stabbing takes place near school



Alanna Kelly Journalist/Weekend Anchor

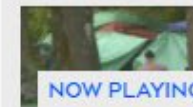
[@CTVNewsAlanna](#) | [Contact](#)

Published Tuesday, September 15, 2020 8:41AM PDT

Last Updated Wednesday, September 16, 2020 6:42PM PDT



Residents concerned over homeless encounters



NOW PLAYING

Several Victoria residents are sharing their stories over frightening RECENT experiences with campers near their homes.

Police investigate stabbing at Beacon Hill



Victoria police are investigating a stabbing that took place in Beacon Hill Park near a school where kids were just beginning to arrive.



“During COVID, it’s really sticky,” said Chris Livingstone, an outreach worker with Smoke Signals, an organization that keeps Indigenous people connected with loved ones.

“We know that organizations are not allowed to open, so clients are really stuck outside in these spaces and out in the street, and it’s really cold and wet. And we know that Hastings people are getting bad feet infections. People are wandering around with no place to go.”

homeless at 3 large encampments into hotels

Encampments will be dismantled, with temporary supportive housing in hotels, community centres

ASHLEY WADHWANI / SHALU MEHTA / Apr. 25, 2020 10:10 a.m. / NEWS



The B.C. government has secured agreements with a number of hotels in Victoria and Vancouver to serve as temporary, supportive housing spaces for 600 people living across three tent cities – many of whom are vulnerable to COVID-19.

Vancouver receives \$4.9M to install and maintain washrooms for vulnerable residents

Vincent Plana | Feb 9 2021, 4:25 pm



The empty lot at 1115 Hornby Street, next to the Murray Hotel, is the site of new washroom trailers. (Google Maps)

News / Local News

Vancouver police stepping up patrols in Yaletown neighbourhood

The VPD says it has received numerous complaints from residents in Yaletown, who say they feel unsafe in the neighbourhood.

Tiffany Crawford

Jul 03, 2020 • July 3, 2020 • 1 minute read • [Join the conversation](#)

Positive Developments

- OPS/SCS visits returning to Pre- Covid levels.
- Increased access to Pharmaceutical Alternatives.
- Introduction of Lifeguard App to reduce the risk of overdose to people suing alone.
- New shelter beds opening in cooperation and consultation with police and community stakeholders.





Inspector Conor King
Victoria Police Department
Conor.King@Vicpd.ca
250-995-7213