

PROJECT LINK

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What is Project LINK:

Project LINK is a collaboration among the Vancouver Police Board, the Vancouver Coastal Health Board, and the Providence Health Care Board. Initiated in October 2011, its goal is to achieve improved outcomes for those living with mental illness and addiction.

Background:

The initial impetus for Project LINK was the release of a 2008 VPD report entitled “Lost in Transition” which highlighted how lack of capacity in the mental health system was draining police resources and failing those suffering from mental illness and addiction.

In response, in 2011 the Vancouver Police Board and the Vancouver Coastal Health Board formed project LINK. Providence Health Care Board subsequently joined in 2015. A major first step was to enable the sharing of information across these police and health organizations. With that in place, LINK was able to make dramatic changes, including formation of the Assertive Community Treatment teams and the Assertive Outreach Teams. These teams have greatly reduced negative contacts with police, emergency room visits, victimization, and criminal justice involvement for those living with mental health and substance use issues. Other accomplishments and initiatives are outlined below.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND INITIATIVES:

Collectively, LINK has led significant change across both the public safety and health sectors. Accomplishments and initiatives include:

- Embedding police officers within Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams;
- Expanding the number of ACT teams in Vancouver from three to five, to support a larger and growing clientele base;
- Improved linkage with St. Paul’s Hospital/Providence Health Care to bridge ACT clients effectively who come into contact with healthcare professionals from different hospitals;
- Developing an information sharing agreement and Privacy Impact Assessment to enable the exchange of critical client information between the organizations, to facilitate the proper care for each individual client;
- Improved communication with the VPD Chronic Offenders Unit to deliver a coordinated approach that ensures appropriate mental health supports are directed to the most prolific criminal offenders;
- Improved collaboration with the mental health programming provided through the Downtown Community Court;
- The development of an ‘early warning system’ within the VPD Mental Health Unit to identify clients at risk and get them the supports they need, when they need them;

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- The development of the Assertive Outreach Team (AOT), a collaborative partnership between the VPD and VCH to deliver short-term transitional support for more challenging mental health and/or substance use clients as they transition from hospital or corrections to primary care service providers (International Association of Chiefs of Police 2015 Weber Seavey Award for quality and innovation in policing);
- Cross-sector consultation to inform the 2016 VPD Mental Health Strategy (Canadian Mental Health Association BC: 2016 Mental Health Voices Award recipient);
- Establishment of a monthly meeting between police and hospitals to review wait times, ambulance wait times, and to foster better communication relative to serving mental health clients in the community;
- Assisting with the operationalization of the Saint Paul's Hospital (SPH) Emergency Department HUB (HUB ED) and Vancouver Police Foundation Transitional Care Centre (VPF TCC), officially launched in 2018. The HUB and the VPF-TCC joined the recently opened SPH's Rapid Access Addiction Clinic (RAAC) and the Overdose Prevention Site (OPS). These four components create a specialized, multi-faceted response model designed to meet people's individual needs;
- Assisting with the operationalization of VCH Access and Assessment Centre (AAC), opened in 2016, and providing 24/7 services for Vancouver residents with mental health and/or substance use, as an alternative to the Emergency department;
- Working with Fraser Health Authority to establish information sharing agreements with police of jurisdiction in the Fraser Region, based on Vancouver model; and,
- Advocating to the Provincial Government for mandated information sharing agreements.