

CITY OF NANAIMO

BUSINESS CASE – RCMP: Mental Health Liaison Officer

CURRENT OVERVIEW

RCMP members are responding to a significant number of calls for service for individuals dealing with mental health issues. To address this, in 2020, one of the new municipal funded members was staffed as a Mental Health Liaison Officer. This member, in addition to a nursing position provided by Island Health's Community Outreach Unit, created the CAR 54 team who are tasked to address chronic/crisis mental health calls.

CAR 54 is a specialized team built on community partnerships to assist vulnerable citizens who have contact with police or require an emergency response. The focus of this team is to build relationships with residents, assist with connections to services, and increase the safety of those who live and work in the City. Services include on-site emotional and mental health assessments, crisis intervention and referrals to appropriate services. Referrals can be to local mental health centres, addictions services, counselling services etc. The program also facilitates admission to hospital in cases where needed.

Since the inception of the CAR 54 team, there has been a reduction in crisis calls for service through better health care management. The goal of the program would be to further support integrated strategies to address crime, community concerns, and personal crisis in an inclusive manner throughout the City.

BUSINESS ISSUE

Over the past 5 years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of mental health calls for service. The current CAR 54 team is only able to cover 4 days a week, and their current caseload poses a significant risk of burnout due to the operational pressure on a single unit.

Due to this lack of capacity, general duty RCMP members are often required to respond to mental health calls for service preventing them from responding to other critical policing issues in the City. In addition, these members do not possess the specialized knowledge of the CAR 54 team. Several mental health incidents involve violent assault, pose risk to the public, health care personnel, and first responders where specialized skills are integral. The three new municipal positions allocated to the detachment in 2024 are identified for other operational priorities and cannot be assigned a Mental Health Liaison Officer role.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The Province provided funding to support an additional nursing position to the Island Health Community Outreach Unit to be deployed as a second mental health nurse. An additional Mental Health Liaison Officer with this additional nurse would provide the resources for a second CAR 54 team. The additional CAR 54 team would add 40 additional hours of service delivery, ensuring continuity of services 7 days a week.

The current CAR 54 team will provide training and orientation, and the two teams will share the specially equipped unmarked police vehicle used to enhance privacy of the individuals and families that they serve.

Increasing the CAR 54 program is anticipated to:

- Build relationships with those impacted by homelessness, mental health and/or substance abuse.
- Proactively liaises with local agencies providing supports and services to citizens struggling with homelessness, addiction and/or mental health.
- Provides emergency response to police mental health calls.
- Allow RCMP resources to be deployed to other key issues in the community.
- Support Island Health mental health initiatives, including Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Case Management (ICM).
- Further reduce crisis calls by identifying individuals and developing comprehensive community health response.

The RCMP are committed to a long term integrated and proactive response that is built on relationships with their partners and the community. When vulnerable persons receive support and develop increased capacity for healthy, safe living, this often leads to a reduction in criminal activity and a reduced demand on social services and policing. This ultimately protects property/businesses and bring solutions to local issues.

OPTIONS

Option #1 –Mental Health Liaison Officer

Addition of one municipally funded RCMP member to be assigned as a Mental Health Liaison allowing for the creation of an additional CAR54 team.

Benefits:

- Allows for capacity to address the increasing volume of calls for service specific to mental health issues.
- Expands an integrated mental health approach which is proving to be well received by the community.
- Ability to expand the CAR54 program to from 4 days a week to 7 days a week providing the benefits of enhanced knowledge, skills, and abilities of a specialized team to assist vulnerable sector.
- Additional resources towards the Mental Health Outreach Team would enable the RCMP to redeploy the remaining members to other critical policing issues in the City.

Weaknesses:

- Permanent increase to operating budget.

Financial Analysis:

The City is responsible for 90% of RCMP contract costs. The projected impact to the contract of an additional member to staff a second CAR54 effective April 1, 2024 is \$138,200 in 2024 and \$189,100 in 2025.

The projected budget impact is \$131,300 in 2024 and \$179,650 in 2025 as the 2024 – 2028 Draft Financial Plan has budgeted the City's share of the RCMP contract at 95% to minimize budget surplus due to vacancies.

Option #2 – Status Quo

Continue with the current staffing increase for 2024 with no dedicated Mental Health Liaison Officer.

Benefits:

- No impact to operating budget.

Weaknesses:

- RCMP will continue to respond to mental health calls taking away from capacity to address other critical policing issues.
- Minimize progress on reduction of crisis calls.
- Building on a community partnership approach to providing supports and services to citizens struggling with homelessness, addiction and/or mental health is delayed.
- Increased likelihood of a negative interaction, which could affect the entire community.

RECOMMENDATION

Option #1 is recommended.