
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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April 9, 2020

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions

New virtual mental health supports for COVID-19 on the way

VICTORIA – To ensure British Columbians have increased access to vital mental health supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Province has announced \$5 million to expand existing mental health programs and services and launch new services to support British Columbians.

“If you are feeling anxious, stressed, depressed or disconnected because of COVID-19, I want you to know that you are not alone,” said Premier John Horgan. “Our government is working to give you more options for mental health support, as we all stay home to prevent the spread of this virus.”

Enhanced virtual services will help all British Columbians with mental health needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on adults, youth and front-line health care workers. The funding will also increase access for Indigenous communities and those living in rural and remote parts of the province. It will provide more options for people living with mental health challenges who are currently unable to access in-person supports.

“I have heard from people right across B.C. about how this pandemic is taking a toll on their mental health,” said Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “Whether longstanding challenges are flaring up or you’re struggling with your mental health for the first time – we’re here for you. We’re working quickly to expand virtual mental health services to ensure that when you reach out for support, someone will be there to help.”

The Province is working in partnership with Foundry Youth Centres, the Canadian Mental Health Association – BC Division (CMHA-BC), the BC Psychological Association and other community partners to deliver new and expanded mental health services. These include:

- providing more access to online programs for mental health by expanding the BounceBack program. BounceBack provides online coaching and the Living Life to the Full program, which helps people deal with life challenges and learn self-management skills (CMHA-BC);
- expanding access to no- and low-cost community counselling programs, including those that serve immigrant and refugee populations, and enabling them to be delivered virtually;
- increasing access to online peer support and system navigation (CMHA-BC);
- providing virtual supports for youth aged 12 to 24 by making Foundry services available around the province through voice, video and chat (FoundryBC);
- providing more online tools and resources to help people assess and manage their own mental health;
- supporting front-line health-care workers through a new online hub and providing virtual peer support (CMHA-BC); and

- a new online psychological support service for health-care workers (BC Psychological Association).

Existing services are being scaled up rapidly to meet increased need while new services are being implemented. Several services are available and online, while others will come online April 20, 2020. See the backgrounder below for details.

The emphasis on virtual support and care will be offered in multiple languages, as well as connect people living in rural and remote communities and Indigenous peoples throughout the province. The Province will continue to collaborate with Indigenous partners to ensure these services are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Indigenous peoples in rural and urban areas.

This funding is in addition to a co-ordinated effort across government to bolster virtual mental health services for children, youth and students related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Quotes:

Jonny Morris, CEO, CMHA-BC –

“The COVID-19 pandemic is having profound impacts on the mental health of British Columbians, with increased reports of stress, worry, depression, anxiety and loss. This investment will help the CMHA and our partners respond to the growing mental health impacts of COVID-19 through increased access to warm, compassionate and skilled virtual care. It is critical that expanded access to mental health and substance use care is part of the ongoing response to COVID-19. Now, more than ever, we need these mental health supports to reach people, even while we remain physically apart.”

Dr. Steve Mathias, executive director, Foundry –

“At this unprecedented time, it is even more important for youth and families across B.C. to know where to find the supports and services they need. With the support of the provincial government and our nine Foundry centres, Foundry is moving our services online, starting with drop-in counselling, and then peer support services and physical health care. We’re pleased to be able to provide these services virtually so that young people and families in all corners of the province can get the help they need, when they need it.”

Lesley D Lutes, Phd, R. Psych., professor, director of clinical training, Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia (UBC) Okanagan; and director of public advocacy, British Columbia Psychological Association –

“On behalf of my colleagues at UBC Okanagan and the BC Psychological Association, we will work tirelessly on this initiative, not only to support direct patient care, but to provide training and support to our mental health colleagues and the next generation of psychologists. We are eager to assist in evaluating new and extended services to ensure that they are both evidence based and delivered to the highest possible level of care. We look forward to developing a meaningful partnership with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and I want to thank Minister Darcy for her support thus far. Whether it’s mental or physical health, I’m pleased that we are all coming together to put the health and well-being of British Columbians first.”

Learn More:

For the latest medical updates, including case counts, prevention, risks and testing, visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca>
Or follow @CDCofBC on Twitter.

For the provincial health officer's orders, notices and guidance, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/phoguidance

For non-health related information, including financial, child care and education supports, travel, transportation and essential service information, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/Covid-19
Or call 1 888 COVID19 (1 888 268-4319) between 7:30 a.m. and 8 p.m., seven days a week.

A backgrounder follows.

Contacts:

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For non-medical information relating to COVID-19:
Visit: www.gov.bc.ca/COVID19
Email: servicebc@gov.bc.ca
Or call: 1 888 COVID-19

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: news.gov.bc.ca/connect

BACKGROUND

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Enhanced virtual mental health supports during COVID-19

The Province is providing \$5 million to expand existing mental health programs and services and launch new services to support British Columbians of all ages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enhanced virtual services will help all British Columbians with mental health needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on adults, youth and front-line health-care workers.

All resources listed below can be found by clicking on “health care and mental health” online: www.gov.bc.ca/covid19

Virtual mental health supports for everyone:

- **BounceBack** – Expanding access to free online, video and phone-based coaching and skills-building program so that more seniors, adults and youth who are experiencing low mood, mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress or worry, can receive care. (Canadian Mental Health Association – BC Division). Available now. For more information, visit: www.cmha.bc.ca/covid-19
- **Virtual counselling services** – Expanding access to virtual community counselling for individuals or groups at low or no cost. A list of community counselling agencies offering virtual support is online. Available now. For more information, visit: www.cmha.bc.ca/covid-19
- **Peer support and system navigation** – Expanding access to virtual mentoring and supports by increasing the number of peer support and system navigation workers. (Canadian Mental Health Association). Available now. For more information, visit: www.cmha.bc.ca/covid-19
- **Living Life to the Full** – Launching access to free virtual Living Life to the Full peer support and practical skills courses for coping with stress, problem solving and boosting mood. The eight-week course is led by a trained facilitator. (Canadian Mental Health Association – BC Division). Available now. For more information, visit: www.cmha.bc.ca/covid-19
- **B.C. COVID-19 mental health self-assessment tool** – Launching a set of mental health screening self-tests alongside the COVID-19 self-assessment tool. (Canadian Mental Health Association). Available April 20. For more information, visit: www.cmha.bc.ca/covid-19

Virtual support for front-line health-care workers:

- **Mobile Response Team (MRT)** – In addition to supporting workers on the front lines of the overdose public health emergency, the MRT will also support the mental well-being and psychological safety of front-line health-care workers, specifically home-care and

long-term care workers, who are experiencing exponential distress and mental health concerns in response to COVID-19. (Provincial Health Services Authority). Available now, 24/7. For more information, call 1 888 686-3022 or email: MRT@phsa.ca

- **Free online mental health first aid** – New online supports for front-line health-care workers to help them cope with any psychological effects they may be experiencing. (BC Psychological Association). Available now. For more information, visit: <https://www.psychologists.bc.ca/covid-19-resources>
- **Online resource hub** – Expanding online resources to include information to improve psychological and social supports and provide strategies to help front-line workers take care of their mental health and well-being. (Canadian Mental Health Association- BC Division). Available April 20. For more information, visit: www.cmha.bc.ca/covid-19
- **Virtual peer support service** – Launching a phone and text-based peer support service, staffed by former long-term care and home support workers, to provide confidential emotional support to current workers, and referrals to other services and supports. (Canadian Mental Health Association - BC Division, SafeCareBC and other health partners). Available May 2020. For more information, visit: www.cmha.bc.ca/covid-19

Virtual mental health supports for youth:

- **Foundry Virtual Clinic** – Nine existing virtual Foundry centres are now accepting virtual walk-in counselling. A new provincewide youth-focused virtual clinic with counselling, peer support, primary care and family support for young people aged 12 to 24 and their families will be available via voice, video and chat. Available April 20, 2020. For more information, visit: www.foundrybc.ca

Virtual mental health supports for seniors:

- **BC211** – The Province has already expanded bc211, a provincewide information and referral service, to match seniors whose support network has been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak with volunteers. This service will take calls from people who would like to volunteer to help seniors in their community with basic needs, including grocery shopping and pharmacy drop-offs and check-ins. Available now. For more information, visit: <http://www.bc211.ca/>

Virtual mental health supports for victims of family or sexual violence:

- **VictimLink BC** – Immediate 24/7 crisis support for victims of family or sexual violence is available by phone through VictimLink BC's 24/7 telephone service. Available now. For more information, call 1 800 563-0808 or email: VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca

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