

Working to Solve Homelessness:

Vancouver Coastal Health's Mental Health and Addiction Services - Urgent Response Team



A significant number of mental health and addiction clients who show up frequently at hospital emergency departments could be better served through community-based health and social services.

Emergency rooms are the place that many people who are homeless come into contact with the health system, especially those who have untreated mental illnesses and addictions. Successful treatment usually involves extensive follow-up and participation in a community based program – something emergency departments are not designed to provide.

To reduce emergency room visits and improve the health outcomes of people with mental illnesses and addictions, the Vancouver Coastal Health's Mental Health and Addiction Services joined forces to create the Urgent Response Team. The Urgent Response Team has staff in the emergency departments at both St. Paul's and Vancouver General hospitals who are able to identify people who need support getting connected to community services.

The Urgent Response Team works with hard-to-serve and marginalized clients who have complex mental health and addiction issues. The team includes nurses, social workers and other health care workers. Their job is to link clients to community-based services specifically designed to meet their complex health and social needs.

The many benefits of the Urgent Response Team include better use of emergency room resources, improved flow of clients between emergency departments and community-based support and treatment services, and reduced homelessness as clients are better served by the health system and better connected to transitional and supportive housing.

Homelessness, together we can solve it.
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