



# ENHANCING COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO CRISES

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## INTRODUCTION

As part of its commitment to ensure crisis response capacity exists in its nine Quality Service (QS) Areas, the Southern Interior, South Island and Surrey/Delta/Richmond QS Areas hosted forums with community stakeholders from November, 2006 to April 2007. The goal was to generate new solutions to the challenge that crises have presented for many years in community living. Discussions were led by Dan Collins, Executive Director, Langley Association for Community Living (project lead) and Brian Salisbury, Director of Strategic Planning, CLBC. The process revealed no single solution will work in every community because each community is different, although uniquely positioned to create its own solutions. CLBC believes responsive solutions to crises are generated when communities themselves are mandated and resourced to build local capacity. Below are ways communities can begin to explore new ways to respond to supporting citizens who experience crises.

## THE CHALLENGES

### 1. Understanding the problem

Present capacity to respond to crises is limited. Often, responses can be costly from an economic and a human resource perspective and don't always reflect person centred planning. Developing collaborative, community-based crisis response plans avoid this scenario because it invites everyone to examine what is happening in their community; deepen capacity for collaboration; better understand early warning signs of crises; use community assets more efficiently; and collect good data (information) to help analyze trends

### 2. Fear of change

Each of us must change our present way of thinking and responding. However, with any change, there is a risk that it will be perceived negatively. Even when present approaches do not produce desired results and there is an obvious need for action, change still causes fear. CLBC believes new possibilities are realized through a community development approach that uses local planning to address these questions and concerns.

### 3. A focus on outcomes

Time is needed to determine the outcomes you want to achieve in your area because these will guide your initiative, particularly if there are measurable indicators.

### 4. Where to start?

Bring colleagues together who share your concerns. Invite people in other communities or sectors facing similar challenges. Dialogue and discover experiences of individuals, families, providers and professional support services. Building capacity takes time as does developing new relationships and the emergence of new ideas.

## LEADERSHIP

### 1. Why leadership is important

Successful local initiative requires a champion, or champions. Ask if leadership will come from someone within CLBC or is there a community leader or group of leaders who can effectively take up this challenge.

### 2. Clarifying roles and responsibilities

Although crisis response is ultimately a QS responsibility, building community capacity requires new people to be added to the mix. This can cause confusion and a lack of clarity regarding “who does what”. Leadership and the QS office must ensure roles and responsibilities are clarified.

### 3. Sustainability and succession planning

Local leadership must be “in it” for the long term to support sustained efforts to think and act in new ways. Since local events sometimes mean certain participants can’t continue their involvement, leadership should think about succession planning at the very beginning. Invite new participants to the table as the process unfolds. The more informed a community is, the more likely they will be to support and encourage the initiative.

### 4. Vesting authority with the community response network

Sustaining the network will be more successful if has legitimate influence over decisions related to crisis response capacity. Ensure there is a clear link to the QS Area office and that this relationship is dynamic. This office will have a pulse on service demand and need, as will the network. The most potent way to vest authority is to fund the network to address and implement required crisis supports and services.

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Six key issues must be addressed to develop optimal crisis response capacity in a QS Area.

### 1. What is a crisis?

Developing a shared understanding of what constitutes a crisis is critical. Understanding crises at the person or situational level is an important first step in achieving a shared understanding. This will influence the types of solutions ultimately generated.

### 2. Understanding community readiness for collaboration and partnership

A comprehensive crisis response plan requires participation by various partners. Engaging them must be considered thoughtfully. Raising awareness about challenges faced by stakeholders and the need to develop community-based response mechanisms is a good starting place but it may require effort to enlist their on-going support. Communities are at different stages of their readiness for collaboration and partnership so a gradual approach to build wider community support may be needed.

### 3. Accessing reliable information

Reliable data must inform planning and decision making. What does the data indicate? If data is limited, ask what accessible information exists. Typically someone in the community has the pulse on

what the challenges are. Some types of crises can be predicted. Who can provide this information? Who are the community sensors?

#### **4. Early intervention and prevention considerations**

Enhancing crisis response capacity involves considering proactive solutions. An opportunity exists to reduce the occurrence of crises through consideration of reduction strategies. A thorough analysis of the types of crises occurring in a community is a good starting place. What are the common themes? What can be learned?

#### **5. Mapping community assets and resources**

Mapping community assets and resources is a time consuming and complex task. If you do this, be clear about what your goals. Maps require regular updating. Such an exercise may result in increased awareness of community supports or the identification of unknown resources. Think about the use of this information.

#### **6. Interfacing with other systems**

People “at risk” of a crisis or experiencing a crisis often have many community and professional supports involved. They may or may not share a common understanding of the individuals and the desired outcome. Each group has its own mandate, and approaches to resolving a crisis. A successful crisis response plan depends upon these partners’ participation and support and on mutually beneficial relationships for all parties.

### **KEY ELEMENTS OF A CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN**

These five key elements appear have been common to all community discussions about crisis response planning.

#### **1. Values and principles**

Whatever mechanisms and processes are established by communities to respond to crises, the model must reflect values and principles that guide CLBC and its community partners. For example:

- those closest to the person must be involved during the crisis and recognized as their circle of support
- all thinking and action must be person-centred
- people’s positive reputation in community must be protected
- services provided must be safe for everyone
- crisis supports must be timely and appropriate

#### **2. Governance**

While CLBC is the fall back position for communities, new crisis response models should consider locating and funding responsibility for coordination and facilitating access to needed supports to citizen level governance. This is consistent with CLBC’s vision and mandate.

#### **3. Structure and function**

There is a need to ensure whatever model is designed can respond rapidly, and is sufficiently flexible and adaptable to address people’s unique needs. Local geography and patterns of economic exchange

will influence the design. Many ideas emerged regarding potential functions of enhanced crisis response including:

- design and implementation of early intervention and prevention activities
- coordination of ongoing training and community education
- liaison with generic services to improve their response capacity and ability to accommodate
- development of crisis stabilization beds / robust discharge planning
- improvement of inter ministerial and cross agency protocols
- data collection
- ability to refer to an appropriate agency or community partner
- after hours capacity
- outreach capacity to the individual and their support network

#### **4. Access and referral**

Critical questions include:

- How will individuals and families access the supports?
- Who will make referrals?
- How will decisions be made regarding who receives supports?
- Is the service open to individuals of all ages?
- How will communities be informed of the services?
- How does this service ensure integration with other available community services?

#### **5. Evaluation and renewal**

Evaluation is critical to effective service delivery. Communities need to consider both outcomes and deliverables. Introduction of enhanced community crisis response capacity is intended to stimulate new ways of responding to old problems as well as encourage new relationships in the community.

Evaluation should be influenced by:

- the measure of community involvement
- improved response capacity
- individual and family or referral source satisfaction
- reduction in crisis and emergency referrals to hospitals, forensic services, and crisis response teams
- ability to adapt and redesign itself as required

## **CONCLUSION**

Building or enhancing community capacity is a complex undertaking that requires each participant to commit to creating a climate where there is a belief that different groups and individuals can come together and accomplish things.

In adopting a community development approach to increase capacity to respond to crises we are agreeing to enter into new relationships with multiple partners, for the long-term, and to work towards achieving a common goal.

This is time consuming and potentially difficult, but ultimately rewarding work.

CLBC is committed to the genuine sharing of authority, accountability and resources as we collaborate to meet a genuine need that each of us is unable to meet in isolation.