



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT PLANNING, RESEARCH & AUDIT SECTION

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To: Drazen Manojlovic, Director
i/c Planning, Research & Audit Section

From: Kristie McCann, Research & Policy Advisor
Planning, Research & Audit Section

Subject: *Estimates of the Impact of Mental Health Calls on the Vancouver Police Department* **PR#2009-54**

Assignment:

To calculate an estimate of the impact of mental health calls in terms of cost for the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) for the City of Vancouver (COV).

Background:

The COV requested that the VPD provide a rough estimate of the costs associated with mental health issues for the VPD for a report being prepared. The cost estimates provided by the VPD will be added to cost estimates provided by other COV agencies (e.g., Fire, Ambulance) to give an estimate of the overall cost of mental health issues for the COV.

Research:

There are a number of challenges in establishing the impact of mental health on policing. While it is accepted that police are often front line mental health workers, it is difficult to quantify this. In some cases, it is clear that mental health issues are involved in the call for service (e.g., suicide, Section 28 apprehension). For others (e.g., disturbance, suspicious person/circumstances, assist general public), mental health problems are known to frequently be a factor but are often not recorded within the police records. Given this challenge in identifying all the calls that involve mental health in some way, the use of the *Lost in Transition* estimate is considered the most useful at this time.

The VPD published its report, *Lost in Transition*, in February of 2008 and concluded that approximately 31% of all the calls for service received by the VPD in 2007 had some mental health component. It is logical to assume that this estimate did not change much, if at all, over the course of one year and therefore this estimate of 31% has been used for the current purposes.

In 2008, the VPD received 189,386 calls for service. Using the 31% estimate, this implies that 58,710 calls for service attended by VPD units involved a person suffering from mental health problems. Assuming that calls involving mental health problems require roughly the same police resources as the average police call for service¹, 152,645 police officer hours would be required annually to deal with mental health-related calls. This is equivalent to approximately 90 full-time frontline officers. The direct annual cost associated with these police resources in 2008 would be approximately \$9 million.

Conclusion:

Though there are limitations to the estimate, it is clear that the VPD receives a high proportion of calls that are mental health involved. The cost associated with this high number of calls is \$9 million annually, equal to approximately 90 full-time front line officers.

¹ On average, each call requires 2.6 officer hours to complete. Some evidence suggests that calls involving people suffering from mental health issues actually take longer than the average call, using closer to 3 officer hours. Therefore, the estimates in this report could be considered underestimates in terms of officer time and also the total costs associated with mental health calls.