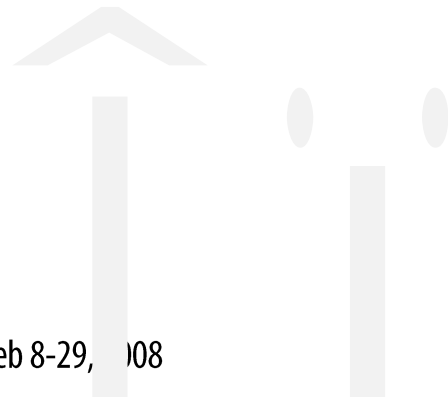




CANADIAN MENTAL  
HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE  
POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE  
**BC Division**



## We Want to Listen:

Report on the Internet Survey Conducted by CMHA BC Division Feb 8-29, 2008

### Introduction:

When the Vancouver Police Department released its report *Lost in Transition* about Police encounters with people with mental illness, we knew that their findings resonated with our experiences at Canadian Mental Health Association. We wanted to find out if people in the community had some opinions about the recommendations from the report.

We developed a quick internet survey and posted it on our web site for three weeks from Feb 8 until Feb 29. We promoted the survey through our branches and their network of staff, family members and people with mental health concerns.

It wasn't a perfect survey but it was our first time at getting on the web and engaging in dialogue with community members.

### Who replied?

We received over 220 replies in the three week period from all over the province. People self identified as a service user, a family member or a service provider.

- **Regions:** heard from a broad cross section of communities. Strong representation from Interior Health and the Island: more than 60% of responses.
- **Perspectives:** Broad perspectives. Most people came from multiple perspectives. People with direct experience (17%), family members (24%), community NGOs (24%), health authority service providers (13%), interested citizens (21%), criminal justice professionals (1%).

### The closed questions What we found:

- **Do you think a secure care facility is needed in your region?** More than half (54%) gave a strong yes to this question, and almost another third (27%) who somewhat agree such a facility is needed.
- **Are there secure care beds for people who need them in your region?** Quite a mixed response. 30% said a strong no and another 15% somewhat disagreed. Nearly a quarter (23%) somewhat agreed that there are such beds. But nearly as many (21%) said they didn't know.
- **Do you think an Urgent Response Centre specifically for people with mental health/addiction crises is needed in your region?** 82% strongly agreed that such a centre is needed in their region. Another 12% somewhat agreed.

- **Are there adequate services for people with concurrent mental illness and addictions in your region?** 65% said a strong no, and another 18% somewhat disagreed.
- **Do you think the Mental Health Act is being applied appropriately to people in mental health/addiction crises in your region?** Another mixed response. 26% said a strong no, 20% said likely not, 21% said likely yes, and 22% had no idea.
- **Do you think there's effective communication between the hospital and community mental health sectors in your health region?** Mixed, but the leaning towards no, with a third saying a strong no, another 27% somewhat disagreeing, and only a quarter agreeing (at any intensity).
- **Do you think there's effective communication between health authority programs & local nonprofit agencies re: client needs?** Nearly identical to the previous response.
- **Have you had personal experiences with the police over a person with a mental illness?** 60% said yes.

## The comments What we found:

1. **People want to talk.** People are keen to comment on their experiences with the mental health and addiction system. Many echo the police concerns that there are simply too many people coming into crises involving the police but our first point is that we found a hunger to be in dialogue about what was before people.

*I am grateful to take part in this discussion. If we treat the real problems and respect the person- we may have some success.*

*Thank you for doing this. I work in the mental health field and I am appalled at the way government is implementing policies without consulting with consumers.*

*The Vancouver Police Department's report is welcome and only surprising in that it took 10 years for people to realize the extent of the government's most recent betrayal to BC people with mental illness.*

2. **Social Justice:** People want something more for the people on the street. They were genuinely offended by the sight of such obvious misery in their communities. People also objected to the warehousing of mentally ill people in our jails and penitentiaries.

*As a society we have a responsibility to provide people with warm beds and food and teach them to care for themselves.*

*The system has utterly failed people with mental health and addiction needs.*

3. **Role of the Mental Health Act and Secure Care:** People expressed different opinions about the role of compulsory treatment. Some thought the Mental Health Act needed to be more restrictive but others thought the issue was the missing community services and that coercion without services didn't work. Some were fundamentally opposed to coercive treatment. Some were not.

*The government must get in touch-people are dying because they have rights.*

4. **Asylum Care:** Many respondents spoke to the need for secure care or asylum beds around the province. Their feeling was being safe and fed and well nourished with the right treatment and

supports were important. One mother told a very sad story of her son's discharge from Riverview to a flop house in Burnaby despite the fact that the family lived on Vancouver Island.

5. **Current Services:** We received comments expressing both concerns about the current service system and bouquets.

- **New Services:** In areas where health authorities had initiated new service teams that provided more intensive services families and friends were pleased.

*My brother is followed by the ICMS [Intensive Case Management] Team and it has allowed him and us to get our lives back .*

- **Better Access:** One person described getting support through the local mental health centre that had switched to no appointments and walk in service.

*I have been in the mental health system for just over a year but in that time I have been encouraged at the resource and services that this community offers.*

- **Outreach Services:** People felt the new outreach services offered by CMHA were reaching a new group of people

*I am a strong advocate of the community outreach program that serves folks under the radar of the mental health system.*

*The Willow Community Bridging project in Kelowna has been very successful in moving people from homeless to housing.*

- **Collaboration:** Community agency and families expressed frustration at trying to collaborate with health authority staff who often did not value community support. People described having acutely ill people in community settings direct from emergency rooms or from the police. People also described effective collaboration with their forensic liaison worker who acted as an effective boundary spanner.

*The Health Authority doesn't understand the meaning of partnership until they integrate as a partner and not the overlord, success will be limited.*

*Information on Best Practices is available but it requires collaboration which is not forthcoming.*

*We work effectively with the shelters and the mission. The Police Project was helpful in getting us to work together.*

- **Police:** Respondents had both beefs and bouquets about the police. In some communities there was a good collaboration; whilst in other communities emergency mental health providers were not able to yet form an effective collaboration.

*The Police need Mental Illness First Aid so when they are the first responders they know what to do.*

- **Need for Resources:** People in some regions identified a desperate need for resources that often meant people couldn't get help in a crisis or were hospitalized because there simply weren't any community services.

*Chronic needs are plugging up access to acute care.*

*People with developmental disabilities who have an IQ over 70 and aren't eligible for services is a terrible challenge to our community. They obviously need some kind of help.*

*I have come up against closed doors when reaching out for help. I am told there are no beds and no doctors for my child.*

*The Hospital rarely has room and leaves people with mental illness for days in the ER .*

*We have no services in our small community. This is really challenging.*

### **What does this small study call us to do?**

We want to thank everyone who participated. We learned a few things:

1. We need to take more time in preparing our survey. We didn't have the time to pretest the questions and not all the answer scales worked very well.
2. We think we should do more ongoing polls so people living with a mental illness, their family members and community service providers can talk about ongoing change. The fact that many of the comments were positive tells us that the service system is missing the boat by not having ongoing user feedback surveys. We think that people in the system need to hear back when they are doing a good job as much as when there are challenges. We want to push the system to develop better service user feedback chances.
3. We heard people valued tying the discussion to the Vancouver Police Department report. It kept them [REDACTED]
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