

Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society
% Liz Charyna, Executive Director
Sent via email

October 12, 2024

Re: BC NDP Response to Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society

Thanks for the opportunity to answer the important questions you've raised. Please see a collective response from the BC NDP below.

1. What does your party believe to be the most important needs of those living with a serious mental illness?

David Eby and the BC NDP believe that everyone in BC deserves a full, meaningful life. We're committed to enhancing services so that people with serious mental illness and their families feel well supported across all stages of life.

In most ways, people with serious mental illness need the same things every person in BC needs – to have a safe and secure home, access to high-quality health care and mental health care, accessible learning environments, a reliable source of healthy food, strong connections with loved ones, opportunities to contribute within the community, ways to feel a sense of achievement, time spent with friends and peers, opportunities to pursue recreation, hope for a promising future, and ways to safely adapt to changing life circumstances, like aging (or aging family members).

We also understand that many people with serious mental illness need a higher level of support to meet the basic needs listed above. David Eby and the BC NDP are expanding mental health supports for all people, with the highest level of support for people with serious mental illness and their families.

2. What steps and action plans does your party believe are necessary to address these needs?

Just as all people have multi-faceted lives and needs, people with serious mental illness and their families need to be well-served by many different ministries, with extra attention to coordination.

The BC NDP has dramatically increased access to early psychosis intervention services. BC now has more than 50 locations where people can get assessed and connected to care, and we have funded the hiring of 100 specialists to provide care and support to young people and their families in the program.

Where possible, our plan is to ensure early identification and intervention. We're putting mental health counsellors in every public school.

If elected, we'll make mental health supports more accessible in the community. Our move to recruit, retain and train more healthcare providers across the board will make it easier for families to receive support, including supports through a family doctor or nurse practitioner. Many people with serious mental illness can avoid crises if they're well supported. This is the goal whenever possible.

When people experience crises, David Eby and the BC NDP are creating new paths to get help. We're launching more mental health crisis response teams who are in the best position to respond, especially when the police are called. We're also launching new, dignified, secure care options for cases where safety is compromised and our loved ones experiencing severe mental illness need a higher level of intervention.

3. Currently BC has good legislation for helping those with serious mental disorders, including involuntary care and treatment when appropriate. This ability for physicians to intervene and provide involuntary treatment is being challenged. Please advise where you stand on this and why.

The BC NDP supports provisions under the Mental Health Act which allow involuntary care under a specific set of conditions, including sign off from two health care providers.

When our loved ones with serious mental illness are experiencing crises and are no longer in a position to help themselves, supports must be in place to ensure they are safe, as well as the community around them. We do not have plans to amend the Mental Health Act to remove these provisions.

On the contrary – we are developing new treatment tools to ensure that people who can't safely be cared for in the community can receive appropriate, dignified care in more secure settings when they are admitted under the Mental Health Act.

At the same time, it would be unjust to enhance involuntary care without a robust effort to ensure mental health and addiction support – particularly preventative care – is accessible, timely, and effective when people ask for it. The situations that result in use of the Mental Health Act for involuntary care are distressing for everyone, especially the people in crisis and their families. We have a duty to prevent these situations as much as possible. The BC NDP is building a compassionate province with stronger and more accessible mental health resources for all.

Rustad's plan is to stigmatize mental illness. His focus is on making crises less visible instead of providing meaningful supports. This isn't good enough for our loved ones and their families in BC. Clinical research, in BC and abroad, shows that for treatment to be effective, it must be carefully planned, coordinated over the long term, and well-integrated in our communities. This is the model of care used by our province's top mental health care experts at the Red Fish Healing Centre.

Everyone deserves access to high quality health care, when and where they need it. With a BC NDP government, this will always include mental health.