

Deputy Chair Committee of The Whole
Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA
Courtenay-Comox



SAFETY FOR EVERYONE!

Supporting and creating ways to be safe where we live is a top priority. Safety has many parts: physical safety, secure housing, free of crime, receiving help navigating the support network, back-country safety, and financial safety. Here are the latest updates on the programs, funding, and legislation that have your safety in mind.

Supporting Small Businesses with vandalism costs

Our government has been working to make our communities, businesses, and homes safer and our downtowns more welcoming to everyone. Recently, Brenda Bailey, Minister for Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation visited Courtenay-Comox. Together we met with some small businesses where Minister Bailey heard about their rising costs related to vandalism. This reinforced what we've been hearing in communities across BC and we've responded by introducing a new Securing Small Business Rebate to help with the cost of vandalism and preventative measures against crime. Through this rebate program, business will be able to apply for up to \$2,000 for the costs of repairs due to vandalism and up to \$1,000 for vandalism prevention. We want to continue to find ways to help keep our communities prosperous and safe for everyone!



Why I brought the need for a permanent, purpose-built shelter to the attention of the Minister of Housing

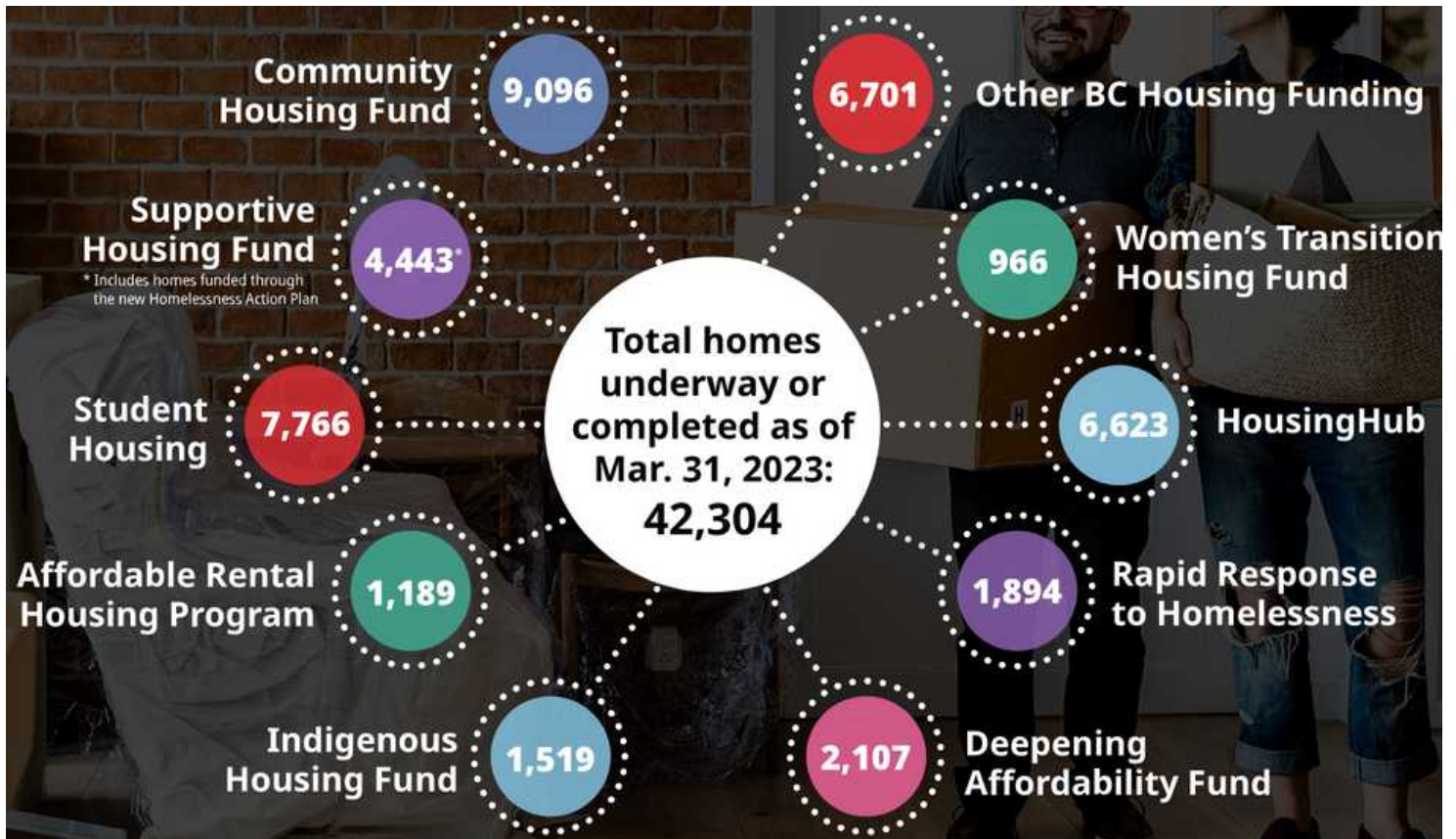
There are so many reasons why people lose their housing. Whether for financial reasons, leaving abuse, mental health and/or addiction challenges, or life's other many challenges, everyone should have a safe place to rest their head at night. The provincial government is committed to putting resources into housing across the spectrum of need, including shelters. Our community has been well-served by the Salvation Army Shelter and the Comox Valley Transition Society's Lilli House, but the number of people living on the street has been growing, here and across the province.

In winter, temporary shelter has been provided through mats on church floors where willing congregants have opened their hearts and doors, while the City of Courtenay and BC Housing assisted the Comox Valley Transition Society to open the Connect Warming Centre in downtown Courtenay, operating daily from 10am to 5pm. Originally operating as an Extreme Weather Response shelter, it transitioned into a temporary winter shelter, before being extended this past spring to a year-round shelter due to the need in our community, providing services for up to 33 individuals.

Shelters are a necessary part of some people's housing journey, and hopefully only a temporary one for them. But those shelters should not be temporary. A purpose-built shelter with staff can provide basic needs including daily meals, laundry, washrooms, showers, and access to support workers to connect guests to local services such as healthcare. A permanent, purpose-built shelter would provide those experiencing homelessness in our community with the kind of safe, secure access to services, providers and resources that can change their lives.

BC Housing continues to work with the City to identify a permanent location for a purpose-built shelter to support our community alongside community partners. It's time.

Provincially supported housing projects - latest numbers



Comox Valley gets funding for a new method of front-line engagement

The John Howard Society has received \$65,000 from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor's General Office to support the implementation of a Comox Valley Situation Table, an organizational tool which increase efficiencies in addressing issues in Courtenay-Comox. Situation Tables are teams of local front-line workers in health, police, and social service agencies working together through effective communication for early intervention, before a person's situation escalates to the level of criminality while giving people the right supports at the right time and freeing police to focus on criminal behaviours. This is a way to have our services coordinating to increase safety for all and is a massive step forward in prevention.

I introduced this tool to Courtenay council in the spring of 2022. I am grateful to the CV Community Justice Centre for shepherding it along. I am excited that John Howard Society, with their experience with the Campbell River situation table, has taken on convening the table.

Community Integration Specialist

The Comox Valley has received funding for another Community Integration Specialist. This is an incredibly valuable position in that it helps individuals navigate and access services like understanding eligibility requirements, completing applications, and obtaining documentation to receive services. I am very happy when people step up into these positions that have a direct and effective impact in people's lives. [Click here to watch a video about the position and hear from other CISs.](#)

New team will help people in mental-health, substance-use crisis in the Comox Valley

People experiencing a mental-health or substance-use crisis will soon have access to a new community-led crisis response team right here in our community. The team will be made up of peers with lived experience and mental-health professionals who will serve people aged 13 and above in the Comox Valley.

The Province, with the support of the Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division (CMHA BC), is bringing new Peer Assisted Care Teams (PACT) to Prince George, Kamloops, and the Comox Valley. These teams will support people in crisis by meeting them where they are, providing person-centred care and connecting them to follow-up supports. These are mobile, community-led crisis teams that are trained to de-escalate mental-health crisis situations and provide trauma-informed, culturally safe support

There was great celebration the Comox Valley, for this much celebrated announcement. I was privileged to welcome

Minister Jennifer Whiteside (Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions), Jonny Morris (CEO of the CMHA), and Lacey who works with PACT in Victoria (read her words above). I know that the Peer Assisted Care Team will help many vulnerable people in our community when they are in crisis, while freeing up police to focus on crime and law enforcement. In 2022, the Province committed \$10 million for new and existing PACTs including the new PACT here in Comox Valley.

"Imagine: you, your loved one, your neighbour asking for help. The care received should be grounded in compassion and understanding. A Peer Assisted Care Team is meeting crisis with kindness and our hope is to convey that in every interaction."

Lacey
AVI crisis response manager
on why PACTs are important



Local announcement of PACT in the Comox Valley with Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Jennifer Whiteside

New programs, police standards support sexual assault survivors

To support the recovery of sexual assault survivors, the Province is providing stable, annual funding for 68 new sexual assault programs that will deliver co-ordinated, community-based services throughout British Columbia. 5 new regional sexual assault centres have been added this year that will provide dedicated co-located spaces to deliver wraparound services for survivors of sexual assault. The funding works towards the establishment of new policing standards for responding to sexual assaults, will respect and support the diverse needs of survivors and ensure more effective investigations.

The Province now provides over \$54 million annually in stable funding for services and programs to support victims of crime. I am confident that this funding for organizations that support survivors will benefit people across B.C., including here in the Comox Valley where we're fortunate to have the Comox Valley Transition Society doing this important work. [See the full press release.](#)

Province investing in growth of non-profit housing providers

A new provincial funding commitment of \$14.8 million is supporting the operations and growth of non-profit housing providers to bring more housing and services to people in B.C.

Approximately \$10.2 million of the one-time funding has been distributed among numerous non-profit housing organizations in B.C. to help replenish reserves and provide economic stability. The remaining funding supports education grants for non-profits, office and administration costs and financial assistance to several social housing projects in need of additional funding.

Wraparound supports expanded for young people

Young people with addictions challenges will now have access to more wraparound supports to get the help they need in hospital and the community on their pathway to wellness. The government is investing \$1.73 million in Dan's Legacy Foundation to support 10 therapists, two social workers and four youth outreach workers. This support also includes follow up services to help young people transition back into their community afterwards.

Climate Action Tax Credit

With global inflation squeezing people, David Eby and our government are taking action to ensure more money comes back to you - including through this expanded tax credit. You may have seen this come through in your bank account earlier last month. The income threshold to receive the climate action tax credit was raised, and the credit amount increased. Over two million individuals and family got the credit in their account earlier in the month. A single person can now receive as much as

Updated court rules will improve access to justice

Amendments to the Supreme Court Civil Rules and Supreme Court Family Rules will make it easier for people in B.C. to access court services. Using plain language will improve accessibility, particularly for people who speak English as an additional language. These changes were recommended by the Supreme Court Civil and Family Rules Committee based on feedback from court users.

Decision on Surrey Police Service ensures public safety in Surrey, the province

Minister Farnworth has determined that for the second time, the city has failed to demonstrate that moving back to the RCMP will be safe and not affect other communities throughout the province, thereby not meeting the requirements imposed on the process. The decision was made to avoid a crisis in policing in Surrey, which would have pulled officers from other parts of the province as officers are redeployed to fill critical gaps.



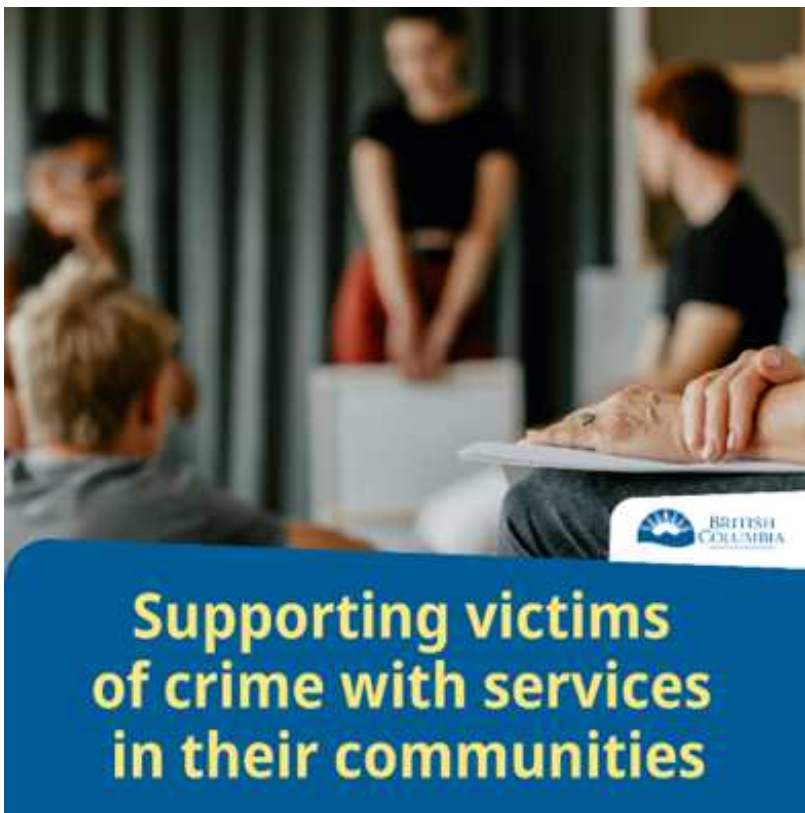
\$447 per year, an increase of more than \$250 from 2022, or more than double what they received last year. A family of 4 can now receive as much as \$893.50 which is \$390 more than last year

If you have children you may also want to check the [updates on the family benefit by clicking here.](#)

Indigenous-driven solutions lead the way on Path Forward

To support B.C.'s commitment to end violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, the B.C. government has provided a grant of \$5.5 million to continue the Path Forward Community Fund managed by the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC). The Path Forward Community Fund provides funding for community safety planning and capacity building, and to ensure the self-determination of Indigenous communities to address violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

The grant is in addition to the foundational investment of \$5.3 million made in 2022 to respond to priorities identified through Indigenous community engagement. The top priority was to create a Path Forward Community Fund that is accessible to First Nations communities, urban and off-reserve communities, Métis, Inuit citizens and 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities, so that Indigenous communities could create culturally safe and appropriate solutions for issues that result in violence. [To read the 2023 Path Forward Report, visit this link.](#)



New funding advances public safety, connects victims with services

People throughout the province will benefit from projects that advance community safety and crime-prevention initiatives, assist people experiencing gender-based violence, and support Indigenous people recovering from trauma. The Civil Forfeiture Grant Program provides funding to support community-safety-related projects throughout British Columbia. As part of the 2022-23 cycle, \$9.7 million will support 197 community projects and fund police equipment and training, with \$3.7 million collected from forfeited recoveries as well as \$6 million from provincial funding.

Backcountry kept safer by supporting ground search-and-rescue groups

To ensure that the life-saving work of Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) groups and their volunteers are there when people need help in the backcountry, the province is providing nearly \$6 million in annual funding. This funding supports the GSAR groups' life-saving rescue equipment, essential training, protective equipment for volunteers and administration costs, such as insurance. British Columbia is the first province to have this kind of agreement with Search and Rescue GSARA. You may have seen the most recent rescue from our local crew ([read here](#)), which affirms that the funds are being put to good use.



What's Missing? B.C. launches demographic survey to identify and eliminate systemic racism

Everyone deserves equal access to strong public services. Having basic demographic information will help us understand how different people experience government services and programs, and will help us identify and eliminate systemic racism. The deadline to complete the survey is September 30th. [Click here.](#)

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES

Is someone in your life, your workplace, or your church celebrating a Milestone birthday or anniversary? Make sure to put in a request for a letter from your MLA.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

The province of BC wants to hear from you. There are a number of topics that you will find on engageBC.

Get in touch

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about any provincial issue, please don't hesitate to reach out. We are here to help you. Our office is currently open for appointments only. You can reach us at 250.703.2410 or Ronna-Rae.Leonard.MLA@leg.bc.ca.

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