

# CMHA Cowichan Valley Branch Mental Health Quarterly



Welcome to our first quarterly issue of **Mental Health Quarterly**.

We are very excited to offer useful news, educational information, helpful hints, and information about local events associated with your local Canadian Mental Health Association branch.

In this issue, you will find information on fentanyl and homelessness.



## [When Home is a Cardboard Box](#)

It can be hard for those of us fortunate enough to be able to access this e-newsletter while in the comfort of our own homes to imagine what it would be like to be **truly** homeless.

Here **in the Cowichan Valley there are signs of homelessness** everywhere. Mini tent cities that move around, people loitering in front of stores, and some people standing on the road meridians looking for handouts. Regrettably, people have a tendency to make judgments about others without really knowing them. Some yell and spit at people who are homeless. There are reports of people without homes being beaten.

Not long ago, several people have been seen living under cardboard boxes near our local McDonalds while a torrent of rain pelted their makeshift homes. **What would it be like to call a cardboard box a home?** First, there are the physical sensations such as being cold, wet, and hungry. Then there is the social aspect -- knowing that many of the people passing you view you with utter contempt; some might even attack you.

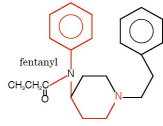
Perhaps some of the people who knew you before you became homeless would be embarrassed to acknowledge your acquaintance. You have no place to truly call your own and the **risk of losing all if you walk away for even five minutes**. There is the problem of toileting and personal hygiene. What would it be like if everyone could stop and think for a minute what would it be like to have this life? Would we be able to see the person and not just their current living arrangement?

Fortunately, there are resources in the Cowichan Valley for those without housing or at risk of becoming homeless. **CMHA-CVB manages a number of different local housing options**, and currently supports the housing needs of approximately 100 individuals. This includes the most well-known resource, **Warmland House**, and lesser known supportive housing units dispersed throughout the community.

Warmland House may not be a good fit for every person who walks in the door yet, many people benefit from the resource. Some only use the shelter to get protection from extreme weather conditions; others seek out a place to get a meal and a shower. **Between April 2016 and March 2017, 321 homeless individuals stayed at Warmland House for a total of 10,740 stays.**

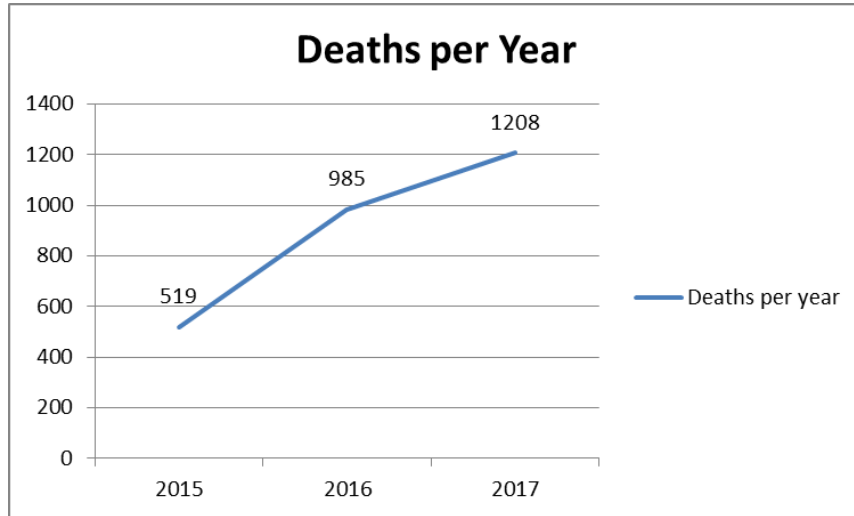
Among those people, **some have transitioned into minimal barrier transitional housing**. As part of their stay, there they are offered a "**moving forward program**" to help prepare them for market housing and reduce their risk of becoming homeless in the future.

***Until the problems of homelessness are solved, there are many dedicated individuals who are there to support those who call a cardboard box home.***



## Fentanyl Crisis

Lately, there has been a significant amount of media attention on the ever-growing problem of drug addiction and drug overdoses. **In 2017, there were 117 suspected overdose deaths in BC alone, a 63% increase from the year before.** The increased availability of Fentanyl in street drugs is largely to blame. This is one of the more common drugs leading to fatal drug overdoses in B.C.



Please note: the data for 2017 does not include November or December.

Fentanyl is a manmade (opiate) drug that has similar properties to morphine. Fentanyl is thought to be **50 to 100 times stronger (and more toxic) than morphine.** Typically, Fentanyl is used to treat severe pain. This could include pain management after a surgical procedure or to manage pain in those experiencing chronic health conditions. Generally, Fentanyl is only used when no other opiate is able to provide adequate pain relief and is generally taken for the shortest period of time possible.

In addition to its pain management properties, Fentanyl can create an intense state of emotional happiness and excitement known as euphoria. This sense of euphoria is one reason why people use Fentanyl for recreational purposes.

**Sometimes people seek illicit drugs to manage pain that has not been adequately managed by other means.**

Unfortunately, Fentanyl causes many different changes to occur within the brain and body besides pain relief and euphoria. These include: "drowsiness, nausea, confusion, sedation, tolerance, addiction, respiratory depression and arrest, unconsciousness, coma, and death."

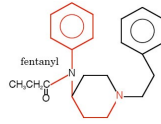
Tolerance occurs when a person needs more of the same type of drug to get the same effect. **Within a short period of time addiction can occur** - a person begins to have severe symptoms when they do not have regular access to the drug. This can impair their ability to make good decisions. Respiratory depression, respiratory arrest, and coma, are life threatening emergencies. Without quick treatment long-term brain damage and death may occur.

**Emergency measures include calling 911, the initiation of CPR, and the administration of Naloxone.** Sadly, people who use illegal drugs are reluctant to seek help, even when life is at stake, for fear they will be "busted" or judged by others.

One huge area of concern is the growing instance of illegal manufacturers and drug dealers mixing Fentanyl with other street drugs (e.g. cocaine, meth, heroin) without the users knowing about it. This **greatly increases the risk of death**, particularly when people use alone. People are also much more likely to use alone if they fear reprisals, a risk factor that greatly increases mortality rates.

It is important to note that the vast majority of people who use and become addicted to illegal drugs like Fentanyl **did not consciously choose to do so.** Rather, **many of these people were prescribed these drugs to cope with pain**, the stresses of life, or simply tried it a few times because of peer pressure, and then became addicted. The Fentanyl crisis *is a medical crisis* that requires a treatment-orientated approach rather than a judicial (legal) punishment approach. The latter fails to address the issues that give rise to addiction and prevents people from seeking the help they need.

**(Continued on page 3)**



## Fentanyl Crisis (Continued)

**CMHA- Cowichan Valley Branch connects people to valuable resources** including Island Health Mental Health and Addictions so that **individuals can be supported while they start their journey to recovery** or minimize additional harm when they are not yet ready. In doing so, CMHA-CVB, the **Sobering and Assessment Centre** next to **Warmland House** helps decrease the burden placed on the **local hospital emergency room and RCMP cells.**

From January to May 2017, the **Sobering Centre** was accessed **238 times, making up about 63% of all alcohol and drug related visits between the RCMP, hospital, and the Sobering and Assessment Centre.** On November 9<sup>th</sup>, we reached our 1,000th visit from 230 different individuals. Moreover, CMHA-CVB manages the **newly-created safe injection site** created by Island Health. Since September 20th there have been approximately 60 visits. CMHA-CVB also minimizes the risk to the general public through its **sharps pickup team** which visits sites known to have discarded needles. CMHA-CVB sharps team does not provide drug paraphernalia to drug users. They only pick up needles that could pose a risk to others.



## Dates of Interest

**Tuesday, January 23rd:** CMHA-CVB will be joining Our Cowichan Communities Health Network in Partnership and Social Planning Cowichan to present the film “**Us & Them**”, an eye-opening film on homelessness and the basic need for human connection. The film will be followed by a panel discussion featuring local community members, including some from CMHA, who are interested in the homelessness crisis in the Cowichan Valley.

**Doors open at 6:30 PM, January 23 at the Cowichan Performing Arts Centre, the film starts at 7 PM.  
Admission is by donation.**

**Thursday, February 8th:** CMHA-CVB will be co-presenting the film “**Crazywise**” with Duncan United Church Social Justice. This film explores multicultural viewpoints on ways to understand, transform, and treat mental health crisis. It is our objective to increase awareness, encourage conversations, and reawaken hope of recovering for those who experience overwhelming stigma and fear. **Discussions afterwards; please join us!**

**The film starts at 7 PM on February 8, at 246 Ingram Street/Heritage Hall.  
Admission is by donation.**



## Mental Health Mondays

Good mental health is vital to our overall wellbeing yet it is often overlooked in our day to day living. Similar to physical health, many people do not consciously think about their mental health until there is a problem. Work, school, finances, various relationships, and other factors can fill our days leaving little time for self-care.

Ideally, everyone should dedicate a little time each day to promote their mental health, yet this is not always easy to do. Perhaps a more realistic *initial* goal would be to dedicate some time each week toward promoting positive mental health, for example having “**mental health Mondays.**” This could include a walk in a scenic place, meditation, socializing with a supportive friend, having a candle lit bath, writing in a journal or even reading this newsletter. 😊



## In Memoriam

It was with heavy hearts that we announced the passing of **Dan Clements** in October. Dan made significant contributions to Warmland House and was a valued member of our team. He will be sorely missed by all those who knew him.

In recognition of his outstanding service, CMHA-CVB has named the Warmland House Cafeteria “**Danny's Diner**”.



## What's New at CMHA?

We are proud to announce that **we have recently achieved accreditation status through Imagine Canada.** Accreditation status requires excellence in the areas of board governance, financial accountability, staff management, and volunteer involvement. A special thanks goes to James Tousignant, Anne Brunet, and Lynda Knippelberg as well as to our hard-working Board of Directors who dedicated countless hours to making this accreditation possible.



## Holiday Humdrums

For many people, the holiday season is a joyous time filled with fun, family, friends, and food. Sadly, there are also those who find this time of year very difficult. Reasons could include lack of social support, grief/loss, high expectations, decreased daylight hours, and financial worries. Remember that there are resources available for those who struggle during and after holidays, or in winter in general. This could include one of the many services offered at CMHA-CVB, the crisis line, reputable websites, or a family doctor.



## Closing note

We hope you found this newsletter useful. If you have a family member or friend who may benefit from this information or our local services, we invite you to share this newsletter with them.

We kindly ask that you encourage others to become a CMHA Cowichan Valley Branch member and/or volunteer so that we may continue to support good mental health in the Cowichan Valley.



## References

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