

Stacy Ashton and Jonny Morris: Providing a continuum of care for British Columbians' mental health

99.5% of calls to BC crisis lines are safely de-escalated by volunteers

As the end of the year approaches, do you find yourself feeling grief, stress, sadness or anxiety? Are you struggling to cope with overwhelming emotions? If so, you're not alone.

The events of the past year—flooding, wildfires, extreme heat, and the ongoing pandemic—have had profound impacts on our physical and mental health, and for many people the end of the year, holidays, and celebrations can amplify the effects.

Behind every British Columbian is a network of agencies that together provide 24 hours a day, seven days a week support for wherever you find yourself. We call it a *continuum of care* and support you in areas such as crisis intervention, suicide prevention, and long-term mental health support.

When people find themselves in crisis or in need of immediate support, the 720 volunteers and 110 staff members at BC's crisis lines are there. And when people call the crisis line number, no matter where they are in BC, they're connected with a specially trained crisis responder ready to listen—99.5% of these calls are safely escalated just on the phone call. The volunteers and staff provided over 2.5 million minutes of support to British Columbians, including 8,283 opioid or addictions-related interactions, and 30,771 calls where suicide was the primary or contributing factor. And through their de-escalation work, the crisis lines saved British Columbian taxpayers \$10.4 million in hospital and urgent mental health response and \$47,891,000 in police attendance last year.

Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division (CMHA BC) and the network of CMHA branches is there for you to provide preventative and supportive services, resources, and educational opportunities. For example, its free skill-building BounceBack® program offers tools to support adults and youth 15+ manage low mood, mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress, or worry. Its workplace hub, workmentalhealthbc.ca, offers training and resources for people in various sectors including continuing care, community health care, community social services, tourism, and hospitality. And its website, cmha.bc.ca offers resources, information and events—all with the goal of everyone being able to realize their human right to their best possible mental health.

If you're struggling during this time of year, you're not alone:

- For immediate help, call 310-6789 (no area code required) to connect with community-based volunteers and staff at BC crisis lines
- If you are considering suicide, or know someone who is, call 1800SUICIDE province-wide 24 hours a day
- cmha.bc.ca has resources, information, and links to programs and events

To find out more about the continuum of crisis care and mental health support in BC, register to attend the upcoming webinar, "Are We Done Yet?" on December 14 from noon to 1:00 pm. The free event will feature a panel discussion with Jonny Morris, CEO, CMHA BC; Asha Coggon, Director of the Interior Crisis Line Network; and Ivana Bilic, Volunteer Crisis Services Responder at the Crisis Centre of BC.

You can register for the webinar at <https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/webinar>