

# Pandemic forces CMHA to move drop-in services online

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**Canadian Mental Health Association**  
*Mental health for all*

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“With the rise in cases of COVID-19 we just don’t have the staffing to be able to follow the public health orders,” Elaina Moss, program manager with the North and West Vancouver Branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), told Coast Reporter. “It’s really important for us to keep our community members and staff safe.”

The CMHA announced the switch Nov. 20.

Drop-in mental health and navigation services are now being offered online and via phone rather than at the Salvation Army location at 682 Gibsons Way, where CMHA had been operating since opening its doors for the first time on the Sunshine Coast last summer.

Moss said they are reaching out personally to people who have been accessing the services, and those who call in will speak with local staff. Low-cost virtual counselling sessions are also being offered to families and individuals.

A free eight-week recovery program (WRAP) and recovery group (SMART) are continuing in person for now, said Moss, and one-on-one meetings will still be possible for those who do not have access to the web or phone.

Demand for services has been high since arriving on the Sunshine Coast. “Our drop-in service is very busy,” said Moss. So much so, that an outreach worker now commutes once a month to assist with social assistance and disability applications. “We’re seeing a great need and people have been responding well, which is great.”

One permanent staff and three volunteers are working on the Sunshine Coast, in addition to two contracted group facilitators, and the association is in the process of hiring a part-time peer navigator.

Even though the Sunshine Coast falls under the North and West Vancouver Branch of the CMHA, services on the Coast have historically been minimal, but the association is now working on expansion as part of a three-year strategy, said Moss.

The branch specializes in peer support, counselling and supportive housing.

Currently the association is in the process of consulting with colleagues, community members and other organizations to identify gaps in services and what’s needed in the area.

“We are really committed to making sure these services can continue on the Coast and that they grow and develop in partnership with the services that are already on the Coast. It’s an exciting opportunity,” said Moss, who described the association’s expansion as “an evolving project.”

Funding sources for the Sunshine Coast services come through grants and private donations.

Since the pandemic, the CMHA has seen a 30 per cent increase in demand for its services.

Anyone who wishes to contact the Sunshine Coast location can reach out to program services coordinator Laurel Phillips at 604-399-9189 or via email at: laurel.phillips@cmha.bc.ca.