

New mental health police service now available on the North Shore

Mental health professionals are teaming up with police officers across the North Shore in a new response team, Car 22



[Charlie Carey, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter](#)

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West Vancouver Police Department and North Vancouver RCMP, including the Integrated First Nations Unit are partnering with mental health professionals to deliver an integrated mental health team, Car 22. | North Shore News files

This article has been amended since first posting to clarify that Car 22 is not affiliated with PACT and that none of Car 22's program components are formally integrated with those of PACT.

A new mental health support service is now active across the North Shore, as police departments have officially teamed up with health professionals to launch Car 22, an integrated mental health response team.

Staffed by officers from North Vancouver RCMP and West Vancouver Police Department, with some members also part of the Integrated First Nations Unit, Car 22 pairs officers with a mental health professional from Vancouver Coastal Health who will ride along with them during their shift.

"The pilot program is aimed at assisting marginalized and vulnerable populations in the community who face mental health challenges," West Van police wrote in a statement.

Announced formally on Monday (Feb. 1), Car 22 will be active six days a week, from Monday through Saturday, noon to 8 p.m., and will respond to requests from officers and other medical professionals for mental health assistance.

The program will be piloted until summer this year, with the intention for it to be funded permanently afterwards.

"To have a mental health-care professional formally partnered with police officers on the North Shore for mental health calls, [it] will improve care for the most vulnerable in our community," said Ira Roness, director of mental health and substance use North Shore for Vancouver Coastal Health.

Speaking to the North Shore News, Roness said the official partnership is a natural progression after a strong working relationship with the RCMP and WVPD for a number of years.

"We've always done outreach work with them, and really have had a very good, strong collaborative partnership with them. What we haven't had was dedicated response, the dedicated staff," he said. "Now we have that more consistent approach to dealing with any type of mental health crisis we have in the community."

The Car 22 program isn't the first of its kind. Operating within the City of Vancouver and staffed with officers from Vancouver Police Department and mental health professionals at Vancouver Coastal Health, Car 87 was introduced in 1978. A second team, Car 88, was introduced in the region in July 2020.

According to VPD, Car 87/88 responds to about 10 calls for assistance per day.

Roness said the take-away from watching Car 87/88 operate in Vancouver is that there's "overall benefit of [a] partnership" with police departments working in conjunction with mental health professionals.

"That's well known for various different communities ... to be able to respond with a mental health clinician and be able to learn from each other and share that experience, and provide that type of service to the person," he said.

The Canadian Mental Health Association executive director for North and West Vancouver, Julia Kaisla, said the addition of a response team on the North Shore is "always appreciated," and the introduction of Car 22 will be a complementary service to the peer-led outreach team the association runs, the [North Shore Peer Assisted Care Team \(PACT\)](#), which was launched in early November 2021.

With the PACT team unable to apprehend someone under the Mental Health Act, this is a key point of difference between the two teams, Kaisla noted. Where there may be danger to civilians attending a crisis, PACT will also defer to 911 call takers.

"Where I really see Car 22 being valuable is when they need to respond to somebody who is at risk to themselves or others, and isn't willing to accept help on their own," she said.

PACT currently is operational from Thursday to Saturday, 6 p.m. to midnight, and Kaisla believes the additional hours of support from Car 22 will only help the community further.

"We've complemented each other ... in terms of hours of service. But I do think that there's a place to have a continuum of response for people," she explained.

Responding to about 40 calls per month since the launch of PACT, Kaisla said the call volume shows that the community needs support like these programs.

However, Kaisla noted that the CMHA has heard from some marginalized groups that a police response "is not a safe response for them."

"I think we always need to be considering how do we need to adapt our services to respond to the diversity of our community in Vancouver," she said, adding that depending on the training of the team members and the first response, escalation may well happen.

In a statement to North Shore News, Sgt. Peter DeVries of the North Vancouver RCMP said the Mounties are concerned "first and foremost with the safety and well-being of the public."

"We would advise anyone to contact the police if they need assistance, no matter what the circumstances and to be reassured that they can expect to be treated with compassion and respect," he wrote.

DeVries made note that police officers have significant training to prepare them for crisis situations.

"Car 22 members are trained in Trauma Informed Practice and have extensive training in de-escalation techniques, culturally informed response, with particular sensitivity to the First Nations community," he wrote.

The Car 22 team can be dispatched by calling 911, the West Vancouver non-emergency line at [604-925-7300](tel:604-925-7300), or the North Van RCMP non-emergency line at [604-985-1311](tel:604-985-1311).