

COVID-19: Summary of Community Plans and Approach in Island Health for Underserved Populations

Updated: May 4, 2020

Overview:

- Community response involves ongoing partnership between BC Housing, Island Health, local government and other community partners to address the needs of homeless and marginally housed.
- On April 20, 2020, the Province of BC released a [Joint Provincial Program Framework for Emergency Response Centres](#) outlining roles and responsibilities of agencies “in developing Emergency Response Centres (ERCs) in communities across the province for people who are experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness and are unable to self-isolate.” This document outlines that BC Housing, through partnerships with not-for-profit agencies, will provide sheltering sites, social support services and on-site management and supports. The health authorities are responsible for health care services, including public health, mental health and substance use, primary care and home support. Community primary care practitioners will provide relevant clinical in-reach.
- In the Island Health region, Campbell River, Port Alberni, Nanaimo, Cowichan and Victoria were identified as initial priority communities. Second wave priority communities are Mt Waddington, Comox, Oceanside and the Westcoast. Response activation is underway for these areas.
- Based on learnings and community feedback, a distributed model – with more and smaller locations for sheltering or housing – is most optimal, allowing for safer and more effective containment of COVID-19 than a sheltering model with a large population living at a single housing site or outdoor park.
- Supporting the health care needs of underserved populations during COVID-19 is coordinated across a continuum of Island Health service areas including hospital and emergency services, public health nursing, environmental health, communicable disease, Medical Health Officers, mental health and substance use, primary care, addictions medicine and population health surveillance.
- Island Health is providing health care services including assessments, testing, triaging, primary care, mental health and substance use, harm reduction, environmental health and public health. Virtual care is facilitated and provided when appropriate. Public health teams assess people for symptoms, track any contacts who are exposed to the virus and support symptomatic people to access testing. Environmental health officers provide education and guidance on risk reduction, physical distancing, cleaning and sanitation. They also ensure food is produced and distributed safely.
- Three streams of work have been identified to support the underserved population:
 - Stream 1 - **Symptomatic individuals**. Services include: Indoor sheltering, health checks, harm reduction, public health (environmental health, infection prevention and control), mental health and substance use, primary care as needed.
 - Stream 2 - **Confirmed positive individuals**. Services include: Isolation/indoor sheltering, health checks, harm reduction, public/environmental health, mental health and substance use, primary care as needed.
 - Stream 3: **Asymptomatic individuals**. Services include: Assessment and screening, health checks, referrals to services and indoor sheltering as possible and as required; in-reach, outreach and mobile services as needed, including harm reduction, mental health and substance use, primary care.

For more information, see islandhealth.ca/covid19 and bccdc.ca/covid19 (priority populations).