

Mitigating Street Violence with Secure Care

Random street violence is an escalating challenge posed by the surge in drug addiction and mental illness worldwide. The absence of secure care facilities and effective treatment options only heightens the risks faced by individuals grappling with these issues. The lack of access to secure care not only leads to overcrowding in hospitals and correctional facilities but also fuels social disorder and violence within our communities.

Without proper assistance and intervention, individuals struggling with mental illness or substance abuse disorders are left untreated, exacerbating their symptoms and increasing the likelihood of violent behavior. It is imperative that governments allocate funds towards establishing specialized secure care facilities to cater to those in need of support.

Statistics reveal that a significant portion of the population, approximately one million British Columbians, experience some type of mental illness each year. Schizophrenia, affecting over one in 100 individuals and psychosis affecting three out of 100 people, are prevalent in British Columbia. Additionally, individuals with mental illness are twice as likely to have a substance abuse disorder compared to the general population, with a substantial portion of them experiencing co-occurring disorders. The economic impact of mental health problems in British Columbia is estimated to be a staggering \$6.6 billion each year.

Individuals with severe mental illnesses like schizophrenia require placement in secure care facilities to ensure their safety and that of others. These facilities provide a controlled environment where individuals can receive treatment, manage their symptoms, and prevent harm. Failing to offer proper treatment and supervision can result in individuals being unable to recognize or control their violent tendencies, posing a danger to society.

Recent random acts of violence in Metro Vancouver underscore the urgent need for secure care facilities for individuals dealing with acute drug addiction and severe mental illness. Relying on the criminal justice system to address this issue has proven ineffective and costly, as it can lead to further deterioration of mental health and perpetuate a cycle of violence and legal entanglements.

By prioritizing the establishment of secure care facilities, we can address the immediate needs of the community and provide essential support for this vulnerable population. These facilities not only offer treatment and care but also facilitate recovery, reintegration, and long-term support, including transitional housing.

Creating a secure and structured environment enables individuals with severe mental health issues to stabilize their symptoms and embark on a path toward recovery.

Additionally, removing these individuals from public spaces can significantly enhance community safety.

Richmond City Council's motion urging the Province to prioritize and implement secure care for individuals struggling with acute drug addiction and severe mental illness highlights the pressing need for action. It is imperative for government to respond promptly to this call and take steps to establish secure care facilities to address the complex challenges posed by mental illness and substance abuse disorders in our society. Despite informing the Premier of British Columbia of this stance in a formal letter eight months ago, there has been no response to date.

Kash Heed spent 32 years in policing where he held high-profile commands in gang and drug enforcement before becoming B.C.'s solicitor general. He is now a Richmond city councillor.