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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions

### **New program helps people with overdose-related brain injuries**

RICHMOND – British Columbians living with brain injuries related to substance use now have access to specialized supports through a first-of-its-kind program in Canada.

Vancouver Coastal Health’s (VCH) Cognitive Assessment and Rehabilitation for Substance Use program (CARSU) supports adults with mild to moderate brain injuries related to an overdose.

“We’re seeing an increasing number of people who experience brain injury after they survive an overdose as the drug supply becomes more toxic,” said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “People living with brain injuries require a specialized approach to care that meets their unique needs. The work being done by the Cognitive Assessment and Rehabilitation for Substance Use program is critical in ensuring more British Columbians can get the help they need and deserve.”

The program helps people living with brain injury and their support persons develop a thorough understanding of their unique needs and limitations, and links them to rehabilitation supports to improve their quality of life.

“VCH is excited to offer this innovative new service to people who use substances, including opioids and alcohol,” said Karen Barclay, VCH’s director, Mental Health and Substance Use, Richmond. “A CARSU assessment will not only enhance an individual’s ability to engage in therapies for mental health and substance use, but also improve their quality of life. Learning about a person’s brain function can be life changing, both for the person with the injury, and for the people who care for them.”

Operated at Richmond Hospital, CARSU has served more than 40 people through its interdisciplinary team, which includes psychiatry, neuropsychology and occupational therapy. To access the service, people living in the Vancouver Coastal Health region can speak with their health-care provider or self-refer by calling the Richmond MHSU central intake line at 604 204-1111.

This is part of ongoing work government is doing to support people with substance-use-related brain injuries, including investing \$4.5 million over three years for the Brain Injury Alliance to help British Columbians live with the changes and challenges they face after injury, including those resulting from toxic drug poisoning.

In addition, the Province has invested \$345,000 in the Constable Gerard Breese Centre for Traumatic Losses to support ongoing research into brain injury, mental health and addictions, and propose evidence-based solutions and services that are integrated, accessible and culturally safe.

Enhancing supports for people living with mental-health and addiction challenges is an integral part of A Pathway to Hope, B.C.'s roadmap for building a comprehensive system of mental-health and addiction care for British Columbians.

**Quotes:**

**Henry Yao, MLA for Richmond South Centre –**

“There is an urgent need to support people with mental-health and addictions challenges. That’s why our government is ensuring some of our most vulnerable, people with substance-use-related brain injuries, can access vital supports on their journey to wellness.”

**Melissa Medeiros, occupational therapist and CARSU team lead, Vancouver Coastal Health –**

“Based on our experience with clients so far, we have seen that cognition is the missing component of our current substance-use treatment paradigm. I believe this will be the gold standard part of treatment. Our clients have said that CARSU has significantly impacted their recovery in a positive way.”

**Learn More:**

Learn about A Pathway to Hope, government’s vision for mental-health and addictions care in B.C.: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021MMHA0049-001787>

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