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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2024MMHA0042-001231  
July 31, 2024

Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions

### **More trained workers will improve mental-health, addictions care in B.C.**

VERNON – People looking for skills training and job opportunities in mental-health and addictions care are now able to access free education and paid work experience in the sector.

Building on the success of the Health Career Access Program (HCAP), which has trained more than 8,000 people as health-care support workers in long-term care homes, assisted-living facilities, home support and acute-care settings since it began in September 2020, the program is now expanding into mental-health and addictions care. This expansion will help fill crucial roles by offering a fully funded certificate program and an educational stipend through the training. The first group of 30 students started in May 2024 with a second group set to begin in September 2024. The Province aims to recruit and train as many as 500 students across B.C.

“Meeting the needs of those living with mental-health and addictions challenges requires a skilled and diverse workforce,” said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “Providing no-cost training encourages people from all walks of life to help us fill essential roles. This ensures that people are supported by passionate professionals who are equipped with the skills to offer much-needed support.”

By welcoming people with varied backgrounds, including those with lived experience, HCAP enriches the health-care community. The program supports education, training and recruitment for roles such as community mental-health workers, peer-support workers and outreach-support workers. Increasing the number of trained staff to fill these critical roles, particularly in a challenging labour market, will strengthen the Province’s expansion of mental-health and addictions services.

“Joining the Health Career Access Program has been a life-changing experience for me. I am receiving the training and support I need to grow my career in health care, something I’m very excited about,” said Michelle Newall, HCAP participant. “The on-the-job training helped me understand what this new career will entail, the university certificate gives me the formal education I need, and the practicum will round out my experience and give me the confidence to work in my new role. I’m grateful for the opportunity and can’t wait to be able to give back to Interior Health and my community.”

Graduates from the program will have the foundational knowledge and hands-on training to work effectively in a variety of mental-health and addictions settings. All graduates agree to work for at least one year in the field so that these training efforts lead to long-lasting improvements in care.

“As our population grows rapidly, the demand for health care, including mental-health care, grows with it,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “To ensure B.C.’s health-care workforce is

able to meet the diverse care needs now and better support people in their recovery, we are taking significant actions in our human-resources recruitment and retention strategies. That's why investments in the expansion the HCAP program to include mental-health and addictions care is critically important."

The HCAP expansion is supported by \$43.3 million from Budget 2023 dedicated over three years to train new mental-health and addictions workers. Enhancing supports for people living with mental-health and addictions challenges is an integral part of A Pathway to Hope, B.C.'s road map for building a comprehensive system of mental-health and addictions care for everyone in British Columbia.

A backgrounder follows.

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## BACKGROUND

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### **What people are saying about expanded mental-health, addictions skills training**

#### **Harwinder Sandhu, MLA for Vernon-Monashee –**

“HCAP has already been successful in training health-care support workers throughout the province, and the expansion to include mental-health and addictions care is a critical step forward. It ensures more compassionate people will get the necessary training they need to enter this essential field which, in turn, means more patients and their families will be better supported when seeking treatment.”

#### **Richard Harding, vice-president clinical and support services, Interior Health –**

“The expansion of the Health Career Access Program is a crucial step in supporting the delivery of mental-health and substance-use services in Interior Health. Health-care support workers are an essential part of our mental-health and substance-use care team. This program not only helps us meet immediate staffing needs but also invests in the future of our health-care system by providing opportunities for passionate individuals to enter the field.”

#### **Heather Herman, manager of community mental health and substance use, Interior Health –**

“As a manager of HCAP participants, I’ve witnessed the transformative impact this program has on individuals and our health-care team. The participants bring enthusiasm, a fresh perspective and a deep commitment to their roles. The comprehensive training and support they receive ensure they are well-prepared to meet the challenges of the health-care environment.”

#### **Katelyn Nyuli, support worker, Interior Health –**

“As someone currently working in the field, I’ve seen first-hand the urgent need for additional staff to support our clients’ needs and help manage our workload. The Health Care Career Access Program is crucial in addressing these shortages. Their contributions not only improve patient outcomes but also alleviate the pressure on existing staff, allowing us to deliver more focused and effective care.”

#### **Kelly Reid, interim executive director, mental health and substance use, Island Health –**

“Caring and compassionate health-care workers are crucial to providing proactive, timely and wellness-focused services to people living with mental health and addictions. As is the case across our region and beyond, mental-health and substance-use programs are challenged by a shortage of skilled and trained staff. This initiative will help bring in more providers to support those who need our care.”

**Aaron Bond, vice-president primary community care and clinical programs, Northern Health –**

“This expansion of the HCAP program to include a pathway to become a mental-health and addictions support worker is a tremendous opportunity to bring additional skilled employees to the field of mental health and substance use. Ensuring that we have employees who are trained in the most current best practices will lead to better health outcomes for clients and those who need support in a range of settings, including community outreach, harm-reduction services and treatment and recovery programs.”

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