



March 26, 2021

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Mayors and Regional District Chairs of British Columbia  
Attendees of February 2021 Regional Calls with Minister Josie Osborne and  
Minister Sheila Malcolmson

Dear Mayors and Chairs,

Thank you for taking the time to join Minister Josie Osborne and Minister Sheila Malcolmson for the February 2021 regional calls. As Minister Osborne and Minister Malcolmson said, these conversations continue to be a great opportunity to hear from you about the key issues and opportunities that you are working on in your communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every single person on the planet in one way or another, and after spending a year vigilant and on high-alert for a virus that is impacting people and dominating news cycles around the world, we are all exhausted. This burnout and sense of fatigue, often thought of as an impact reserved only for frontline workers, indeed affects us all. Our province in particular has been dealt the additional blow of enduring dual public health emergencies, with the overdose crisis also taking an extraordinary toll on BC residents.

It was timely, therefore, that the February calls were focused on mental health and addictions. There were a number of themes that came up during the calls including complex care housing and supports, online resources for mental health support, and safe supply and harm reduction services. This email answers some of your questions and details links and resources for a number of the topics raised.

### **COVID-19 Update**

The [state of emergency](#) is extended to March 30, 2021, allowing health and emergency management officials to continue to use extraordinary powers under the *Emergency Program Act*. On February 5th, Minister Dix and Dr. Henry announced that the [province-wide restrictions](#), put in place to significantly reduce COVID-19 transmission related to social interactions and travel, would continue until further notice based on direction from the

PHO. At the beginning of March, the PHO amended the [gathering and events order](#) so that up to **10 people** can gather **outdoors**.

**For example:**

- Up to 10 people can gather at a park or beach
- Up to 10 people can gather in the backyard of a residence

The PHO reminds us to not gather with several groups of new people, to stick to the same people, and to continue to use COVID-19 layers of protection and maintain physical distancing. All restrictions for indoor gatherings remain in place. **No indoor gatherings of any size are allowed**. Patios and outdoor areas at restaurants, pubs and bars are **not** included as places to gather with 10 people at one table.

**Immunization Roll Out**

Starting in April, front-line priority workers can receive their first dose of the AstraZeneca/SII COVISHIELD (AZ/SII) vaccine. All vaccine appointments will be organized by employers. Appointment information will be communicated clearly and directly to each sector and employer. Front-line priority workers should **not** call the local health authority.

Front-line priority workers identified by the COVID-19 Workplace Task Group and public health include first responders (police, firefighters, emergency transport), bylaw and quarantine officers, K to 12 educational staff, child care staff, grocery store workers, postal workers, manufacturing workers, wholesale/warehousing employees, staff living in congregate housing at places like ski hills, correctional facilities staff, cross-border transport staff, and sectors or settings prioritized due to outbreak response (currently happening).

Vaccine call centers for seniors are open. Seniors can book a vaccine appointment for themselves or their spouses when they are eligible to call. Seniors can also have a family member or friend call for them. Detailed information is available at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/seniors>.

The best source of COVID-19 vaccine information is the [BC Centre for Disease Control \(BCCDC\)](#).

**Online Resources for Mental Health Support**

(Foundry Programs for Youth, Senior Services)

The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions expanded access to mental health supports in response to COVID-19, most of which are available on-line from anywhere in the province. This includes programs and supports specifically focused for children and youth, seniors, students and educators, and health care workers. Information and links to these mental health services can be found [here](#).

### **Complex Care Housing and Supports**

The Province recognizes the need for complex care housing models to meet the needs of a segment of the population that requires more health and social services than are currently provided through existing supportive housing offerings. The Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, per her mandate letter, is working across government and specifically with the Minister responsible for Housing to develop complex care housing. This work is underway and will involve local government, service providers and health partners as it progresses.

### **Safe Supply, Harm Reduction and Wrap Around Services**

People experiencing substance use challenges have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and border closures have interrupted supply chains, leading to an increasingly toxic illicit drug supply. We are committed to accelerating BC's response to the opioid crisis across the full continuum of care, including prevention, harm reduction, safe prescription medications, treatment, and recovery.

### **Police Act Review**

On December 9, 2020, the Legislative Assembly appointed the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act to examine, inquire into, and make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on: reforms related to the modernization and sustainability of policing under the [Police Act](#) (R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 367); the role of police with respect to complex social issues including mental health and wellness, addictions and harm reduction; the scope of systemic racism within BC's police agencies; and whether there are measures necessary to ensure a modernized *Police Act* is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Committee is accepting written, audio and video submissions as part of its public consultation. To make a submission, please visit the Committee's [consultation portal](#). The Guide to Submissions may assist you in preparing your submission. **The deadline for submissions is 5:00 p.m. on Friday, April 30.** Note that UBCM presented to the Special Committee on February 8, 2021; more information about UBCM's submission and presentation can be found [here](#).

### **Situation Tables**

During the calls, several communities highlighted the benefits of the creation of [situation tables](#) in their communities to address the needs of vulnerable people. The situation table concept comes out of the provincial office of crime reduction and gang outreach and the office has invested over \$1.1 million in funding since 2017 for tables across the province. Representatives from health, public safety and social services meet regularly to identify vulnerable people in the community and work to help them receive the services they need. Front-line workers can

rapidly connect with people in crisis, while freeing up police to focus on serious and organized criminal activity. Ten situation tables are currently operational in the province, and work is being done to bring 11 more online.

### **BC Parks – Camping Reservation Information**

BC Parks welcomes all British Columbians to another camping season in BC Parks. This year, British Columbians have priority access to [camping reservations](#) for the entire summer season. Reservations opened March 8 for arrival dates up to May 8 and can be booked up to two months in advance from there on. You can find out when you can book at each park at [bcparks.ca/operating dates/](#). Policy information for 2021 can be found at [bcparks.ca/covid-19/camping-2021](#). For out-of-province visitors, reservations start July 8, 2021 for the remainder of the season. BC Parks will be working with partners and stakeholders to ensure the season is a safe and successful one.

### **Strengthening Communities’ Funding Services**

In February 2021, Minister Osborne announced the launch of the [Strengthening Communities’ Funding Services](#) program. Local governments and Treaty First Nations may now apply for \$100 million in grants to address the impacts of homelessness, support people and strengthen communities’ health and safety. The program will provide grants that support communities to meet emerging health and safety needs on the ground. This can include projects like expanding shelter capacity, fire services, neighbourhood liaison programs, and initiatives to connect people to health services, just to name a few examples.

This new program is application based and open to all local governments, including municipalities, regional districts, and the Islands Trust, as well as modern Treaty First Nations. Applicants must show their projects respond to a demonstrated need in the community and are a temporary-surge response to immediate needs. Evaluators will also be looking for demonstrated partnership and engagement with Indigenous partners and plans to include perspectives of people with lived experience. **UBCM is administering the program on behalf of the Province and will accept applications until April 16, 2021, with approvals expected in Spring 2021.**

### **Local Government Development Approvals Program**

The intent of the Local Government Development Approvals Program is to support the implementation of established best practices and to test innovative approaches to improve development approvals processes while meeting local government planning and policy objectives. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has provided funding for this program and UBCM is administering the program on behalf of the Province. **Applications are currently accepted for**

**this program and the application deadline is May 7, 2021.** More information can be found [here](#).

### **Home Owner Grant Centralization**

Effective 2021 all home owner grant applications must be submitted directly to the BC provincial government through a secure online application. **Municipalities no longer need to and should not accept any applications.** As of February 16, 2021, homeowners can apply for their current year or their retroactive home owner grants online at [gov.bc.ca/homeownergrant](http://gov.bc.ca/homeownergrant). Homeowners can find information about this change at [gov.bc.ca/homeownergrant](http://gov.bc.ca/homeownergrant) or they can call toll free: 1-888-355-2700 to speak with an agent. **We encourage you to share this information with your residents.**

### **Connectivity – Internet Speed Study**

During the calls, communities have raised concerns that the federal data on broadband Internet speeds, which is used to determine eligibility for connectivity funding programs, may not accurately reflect the broadband Internet speeds experienced in homes, businesses, and other locations at the community level.

[Connected Communities](#) within the provincial Ministry of Citizens' Services, UBCM, and Northern Development Initiative Trust are responding collaboratively to these concerns with an independent study of differences between the broadband Internet speeds experienced in some BC communities, and the 50/10 Mbps speed identified on the federal government's National Broadband Internet Service Availability [Map](#). The study will produce factual information on Internet speeds in rural and remote communities, supporting analysis and informing dialogue between the Northern Development Initiative Trust, Indigenous and local governments, Internet service providers, the Province, and the federal government. Data gathering and analysis will occur over the spring and summer months, with reporting of study results expected in fall 2021.

A key first step in this process is to identify which communities in BC have noted inconsistencies between the 50/10 Mbps Internet speed that federal maps indicate should be available, versus actual Internet speeds currently experienced by residents and businesses in the area. Local governments with reports of Internet speeds lower than the 50/10 Mbps speeds shown on federal maps, are invited to self-identify by contacting [Reiko Tagami](#), Policy Analyst, UBCM to request to be included in the study.

## **Transportation**

The Province appreciates British Columbians living in rural and remote communities often have unique transportation challenges when accessing non-emergency health services. On March 9, 2021 the Province [announced one-time funding](#) of up to \$10.7 million for inter-city bus operators and up to \$16.5 million for regional airports to support operations between April 1, 2021 and March 31, 2022. The funding will help protect services people rely on to commute to important appointments safely and affordably – especially for those in rural and remote communities.

Please remember that your staff can reach out to Ministry of Municipal Affairs staff for assistance (see the [Local Government Division staff finder](#) for the appropriate staff person for your area) on specific issues such as grant applications or any other questions specific to your community.

The next regional calls will be at the beginning of April and ministry staff will be in contact with you regarding dates/times and format of these calls. We hope that you will find some time for yourself to regenerate and to connect with your families during the upcoming seasonal holidays – hopefully, the weather will allow a great number of outdoor activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Faganello', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Tara Faganello  
Assistant Deputy Minister

pc: Chief Administrative Officers  
Gary MacIsaac, Executive Director, UBCM  
Nancy Taylor, Executive Director, LGMA  
Todd Pugh, Executive Director, CivicInfo