

**“The economic downturn has led to a 15% increase in the number of people on income assistance over the last year ... the government hopes to save \$25m over the next two years through the reductions,”**

*Vancouver Sun,  
March 30.*

## Starting the Conversations

This document outlines a sampling of changes to community social services as a result of the last two BC Provincial budgets. Most, but not all, of the changes come from three major funding bodies: Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), and BC Gaming through the Ministry of Housing and Social Development.

This document presents some of the stated reasoning behind the changes where available, although it does not pass judgment on the validity of that reasoning. It also does not discuss the impact of these cuts. And this list is neither comprehensive nor conclusive.

This is simply a starting place for much-needed conversations about the state of funding to our social services. From here we hope to develop an understanding of the scope of the impact, both long and short term, which we hope will intensify and deepen the conversations leading to a coordinated community response.

### Ministry of Children & Family Development

MCFD released its new South Island Contracted Service Delivery Plan on February 17, 2010. This plan incorporates a redesign on non-residential contracted services and budget cuts for these services. The plan indicates that in the 2009/2010 fiscal year the Ministry will spend \$22.3 million on contracted services on the South Island. The budget for the coming fiscal year is \$20 million, this is a reduction of 2.3 million dollars – over 10%.



Funding is being increased to Aboriginal organizations, which is good news for the Aboriginal community, and it will mean a further reduction in funds available to non-Aboriginal organizations. The MCFD plan provides general descriptions of services the Ministry plans to purchase and budgets for each service. It does not provide service details or information on which organizations will be contracted to provide the services. The Ministry plans to complete an implementation plan with more details by March 31. This implementation plan and its execution will clarify the effects of cuts and service redesign on people served and on social service organizations. An update to the MCFD plan will be provided at the April 7th event.

### Vancouver Island Health Authority

According to VIHA's October 13, 2009 backgrounder, VIHA has over 300 contracts with community agencies, not-for-profit societies, program service providers and others, totaling approximately \$24 million annually.

Overall, VIHA anticipates reducing these contract expenditures by \$2 million annually in order to protect what they consider to be core programs and services.

'Equality of access across VIHA's service area' is cited often in VIHA's budget backgrounder. This reasoning is resulting in the lowest level of service becoming the norm throughout its service area.

### Here is a sampling of the agencies that have been affected by changes in funding.

**Need Crisis and Information Line:** Until 2010 VIHA has funded separate crisis intervention telephone services in six island communities, including Victoria. The annual budget for these services was just over \$890,000. An RFP was issued to provide what was thought to be a more cost-effective island-wide service using a 1-800 number. Nanaimo has received this contract.

The impact of losing NEED-trained volunteers who have long contributed to the mental well being of this geographic region is yet to be fully realized.

**Volunteer Support:** VIHA states that in Victoria, seven programs receive a total \$290,000 from VIHA to recruit, train and provide

volunteers for seniors' support programs. According to VIHA they do not consider these programs to be 'core' and as a result have cut their budgets by 25%.

### South Island Counselling and Peer Support:

VIHA provides \$480,000 in financial assistance to counselling and peer support providers in Greater Victoria which, according to their backgrounder, is not provided to similar organizations in other parts of the Island. VIHA has terminated these contracts where it feels that 'other supports are available'. Contracts with service providers in Sooke, Port Renfrew and Salt Spring Island are being preserved, as there are no other supports available in these communities.



**“The Mustard Seed Food Bank distributed 5,000 food hampers in March 2009; by November 2009 that number had climbed to 7,200 hampers per month.”**

**South Island Counselling and Peer Support cont'd:** Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre is one of the Counselling and Peer Support contractors that VIHA terminated. GVCCC has been providing service to this community for over 40 years and is now seeing over 1200 people a year. GVCCC has provided this service to the community at a cost to VIHA of less than \$7 per client visit. The other contracts terminated were held by Beacon Community Services, Esquimalt Neighbourhood House, and Pacific Centre Family Services. They provided professional counselling to medium and high acuity clients in the municipality in which they live.

**South Island Drop-in, Art and Music Programs:** Sidney and Victoria drop-in and music programs for adult clients with mental illness have lost all funding while their art therapy will be reduced by 50 percent.

**Meals on Wheels:** VIHA has 'standardized' client payments and support for Meals on Wheels providers across the Island and in doing so reduced their budget by \$375,000 annually. This standardization meant that seven island regions, including Victoria, saw budget reductions and as a result the cost of the meals in Victoria went from free to \$9 per meal to the recipient. Most regions saw an increase in meal costs for their clients.



**South Island Parenting Programs:** Community centres in Victoria, Saanich, Sooke and Salt Spring Island provide parenting programs that duplicate "Positive Parenting Programs" that were

introduced by VIHA Island-wide in 2008. This program is delivered free, and is evidence based. VIHA will wind down these South Island Parenting programs to eliminate duplication and ensure consistent programming across Vancouver Island.

**Residential Care Administrative Savings:** VIHA is being challenged to find administrative savings in all program areas and will 'work with them to ensure savings are found while not impacting direct client care.'

**James Bay Community Project Nurse:** VIHA has not extended the funding for a nurse at the James Bay Community Project (JBCP). Since 2002, VIHA has funded a variety of clinical positions at the JBCP, which is a community-controlled, non-profit organization that provides a range of services for the community. VIHA cites that the position is not a designated core service nor is it available on a wider basis as the reason for the funding cut.

## BC Gaming Grants

With the shift by many funders to project-based funding, Gaming grants, which include Direct Access Grants and Bingo Affiliation Grants, are one of the few remaining sources of funding for community social service organizations that support core program delivery, vital services that include counselling and mental health services, services for seniors, and programs that support low-income, vulnerable families and strengthen parents' ability to care for and protect their children.

Social service agencies that rely on gaming funds to deliver these crucial services are drawing from a decreased funding envelope and continue to experience ongoing funding uncertainties. While gaming revenues overall continue to increase, the level of gaming funding available for community organizations has decreased from \$156m. in 2008/2009 to \$120m. in 2010/2011.

Uncertainty around the future availability of Bingo Affiliation grants, changes in application deadlines and delays in release of funds have placed stress on organizations and created instability. BC Gaming has shifted from three year funding cycles to single year funding which obviously weakens organizations' ability to plan ahead, and the annual application process involves increased administration and diverts staff time away from front-line services.

With the increase in demand for services as a result of the economic downturn, the impact of these funding reductions and changes combine to place increased stress on community agencies, while impacting clients' access to vital services.

## Competition for Donor Dollars

While this backgrounder gives the reader just a small sampling of the kind of cuts that have been experienced by the social services sector in recent months, it is important to note that other sectors have experienced the same, or more. Sports teams, adult arts groups, charities, and service groups all have a growing need to seek funding sources within the community. And when you consider foundations that look to a stable economic market for interest income, you can see that there is ever-growing competition for donor dollars. With the social service capacity already stretched to its limits, our ability to successfully compete for those limited donor dollars is questionable.

And so the conversation continues ...