



Honourable Josie Osborne
Minister of Health
and
Amna Shah, MLA
Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Addictions

December 8, 2025

Via HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca; Amna.Shah.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Request for Funds Community Based Mental Health Counselling for Adults

Dear Honourable Josie Osborne and Amna Shah, MLA:

I am writing, to request financial support for our Community Based Mental Health Counselling Service for Adults ("Counselling Services") for our 2026/2027 fiscal year (April 1 to March 31). Esquimalt Neighbourhood House ("ENH") is very grateful to the Ministry of Health and former Ministry for Mental Health and Addictions for providing funds to ENH to cover its operating cost shortfalls, and since 2019. Again and unfortunately, as of today, our 2026/2027 fiscal year does not have confirmed revenue from any source for ENH's Counselling Services. We are requesting \$150,000 from The Ministry of Health, to support the continuation of this service during 2026/27.

Background Information: Since 1994, ENH has offered barrier free and most importantly, free of charge, supported mental health counselling for adults living in the Greater Victoria Area. This much needed and vital service is primarily offered by volunteer counsellors and overseen by a clinical counsellor and a support staff. ENH trains new volunteer recruits annually (current average of 14-16 volunteers); training is intensive and conducted weekly from the fall to early summer. As of July 2025, 14 newly trained volunteer counsellors began providing counselling sessions. In October, 2025, 18 new recruits commenced 10 months of training. ENHS' volunteer counsellor retention data shows 40% of volunteers trained, provide counselling support services for 5+ years. Annually, ENH hires by contract, a facilitator to recruit and train volunteers and at the end of each 10-month training period, provide clinical supervision to successful candidates for 2 months following. For 2025/26 and as of today, 45 active counsellors have/are providing counselling sessions.

Financial Background: – From the onset, government (regional and provincial) funded this service. In December, 2010, government funding for the service shifted to other priorities. From 2011 to 2018, ENH financially struggled to continue the service through various short term annual grants and donations. Fortunately, our local health authority, Island Health, provided ENH with a one-time only grant for the 2018/19 fiscal year in order to cover that year's financial short-fall. Since, 2019/20 to 2024/25, the Ministry for Mental Health and Addictions has provided annual funds to ENH to cover its operating cost shortfalls. The Ministry for Health covered ENH's shortfall for the current fiscal year 2025/26. Thank you!

Service Delivery - Caseload

The following is a caseload comparison for the last six fiscal years. Since March 2020, demand for service increased dramatically and has remained steady over the past five fiscal years. ENH expects to end the 2025/26 fiscal year similar to 2024/25.

	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Clients – 1 session	80	78	87	63	58	87
Clients – 1+ sessions	494	515	521	538	466	250
Total Clients	574	593	608	601	524	337

Clients and Referrals:

Clients' presenting issues are a wide array; such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, trauma, neuro divergence, brain injury, addictive behaviours, bipolar, schizophrenia, abuse, isolation, domestic violence, etc. Referral sources vary - many are from our local health authority - Island Health (Dr's, health units, hospitals, USTAT, social workers, Victoria Mental Health, etc.); self-referral; other community groups such as Salvation Army, Victoria Sexual Assault Centre, Victims Services, Women's Transition House; family members, etc.

Implementation:

Continuation of existing and long term Counselling Service begins April 1, 2026;

Evaluation:

Evaluation is ongoing and conducted regularly through written and oral feedback received from clients and from volunteer counsellors;

Funding Amount and Use of Funds 2026/27:

ENH is hoping to secure a minimum of \$150,000 from the Ministry of Health. As of today, ENH does not have confirmed funding from any revenue source for the 2025/26 fiscal year. Operating Costs are projected to be \$222,500. In the fall of 2026, ENH will submit an application to BC Gaming for \$60,000; for several years, BC Gaming has provided an annual grant for Counselling Services; however, we are hoping BC Gaming awards \$60,000 again. In the past, ENH has applied to 1 or 2 local foundations, however those types of funds are not always available and/or maximum awards have been decreasing over the past several years and now these types of grants are not reliable.

Projected Revenues and Expenditures for Counselling Services for 2026/27 are provided below.

Please also know these projected operating costs do not consider/include any funding or additional funding that the Community Action Initiative of British Columbia "CAI" has offered. The CAI funds are intended for specifically hiring the services of clinical counsellors; To keep up with demand for service since 2020, CAI funds have enabled ENH to do that – approximately 42% of clients have been helped through CAI funds and the balance of clients (58%) is through ENH's trained volunteer counsellors. The model of service delivery for ENH's Counselling Services is offered by trained volunteer counsellors. ENH is seeking help to cover operating shortfalls for its existing Counselling Services program offered by volunteer counsellors.

Revenues:

Ministry of Health (<u>potential</u>)	\$150,000
BC Gaming (<u>potential</u>) (grant results will be known in Feb. <u>2027</u>)	60,000
Other Grants	<u>12,500</u>
	\$222,500

Expenditures:

Wages/Benefits (Co-ordination/Intake/Supervision/Oversight and <u>additional support</u>)	\$145,000
Volunteer Recruitment/Training/Supervision	30,000
Overhead (includes 8 counselling spaces)	31,000
Insurance (professional liability; <i>premiums continue to rise annually</i>)	6,500
Telephone	2,000
Volunteer Counsellor Recognition/Development	1,000
Direct Client Materials/Support	5,000
Membership/Professional Development	1,000
Miscellaneous	<u>1,000</u>
	\$222,500

Conclusion:

ENH is again asking for financial support. If ENH is not able to satisfy its funding needs for 2026/27, unfortunately, it must seriously consider ending this essential service at the end of March, 2026; an essential service that has been operating for more than 31 years. ENH is also requesting consideration be given to funding this service on an annual basis; financial viability for the continuation of community based adult mental health counselling is the goal.

I would be pleased to answer any questions the Ministry may have or provide you with additional information. I can be reached at 250-385-2635 ext 202 or 250-686-8797 or by email mlmckenna@enh.bc.ca. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Mary Lynn McKenna CPA, CMA
Executive Director

Copies:

Darlene Rotchford, MLA, Esquimalt-Metchosin; Darlene.Rotchford.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Stephanie McLean, M.P., Esquimalt-Saanich-Sooke; Stephanie.McLean@parl.gc.ca

Kathy MacNeil, President and Chief Executive Officer, Island Health; Kathryn.MacNeil@islandhealth.ca

joanne.horn@islandhealth.ca

Barbara Desjardins, Mayor, Corporation of the Township of Esquimalt; Barbara.Desjardins@esquimalt.ca