



## Involuntary mental health care must be ‘dignified and humane,’ B.C. premier says

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People struggling with brain injuries, addictions and mental health issues need “dignified and humane” support services if they’re committed against their will, and B.C. Premier David Eby says the government is putting its faith in a recently appointed adviser to make those services a reality.

Eby said Friday that his government is working on a strategy about involuntary care, speaking days after a deadly attack in downtown Vancouver that left one man dead.

Eby said the 2012 closure of Riverview mental health hospital in Coquitlam put vulnerable people on the streets without adequate supports, especially on Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, where he used to work.

“I watched them go downhill and die,” he said. “It’s horrific and tragic and I think we can do better and I think we can do it in a way that’s humane and respectful.”

He said the work of Dr. Daniel Vigo, B.C.’s chief scientific adviser for psychiatry, toxic drugs and concurrent disorders, will inform upcoming plans to be revealed in the near future.

Eby said there’s still a place for involuntary care in B.C., but “warehousing people” isn’t enough without adequate supports that “hopefully helps them get back on their own feet.”

“I think all of us see that there are people in the community who are not able to look after themselves, who are either being exploited, or who in turn are injuring or threatening the safety of other people,” he said.

Vancouver’s Chief Constable Adam Palmer said this week that police were looking into whether mental health was a factor in two attacks on Wednesday in downtown Vancouver that left 70-year-old Francis David Laporte dead and another man with a severed hand. Police said the attacks were random.

Brendan Colin McBride, 34, has been charged with second-degree murder and aggravated assault, and Palmer said the suspect was “a very troubled man who has a lengthy history of mental-health related incidents.”

Palmer said people with mental health and addiction issues need more government supports to deal with “upstream drivers” of problematic behaviours that result in clashes with police.

“But there are also people with mental health issues who are extremely dangerous that we need to be afraid of, and we need to have institutionalized, and this person, in my estimation, is going to fall into that category,” Palmer said.

Speaking at an election campaign event in Vancouver on Friday, Eby said the province was working with Vigo on a system of care to address both community safety concerns and the needs of people in mental distress.

Eby said involuntary mental health care requires a “full solution,” which entails having the mental health professionals who can provide care and supportive programs to allow them to deliver it.

He said it was up to Vigo to “knit all these pieces together,” and said more information about such a plan will come next week.

Other politicians in B.C. have weighed in on the closure of Riverview since last week’s attacks in Vancouver.

Port Coquitlam Mayor Brad West said online that “closing Riverview Hospital was a historically stupid decision.”

“The evidence is all around us and, sadly, plays out through repeated tragedies,” West said Thursday on X, formerly known as Twitter.