



B.C. leaders call for action from Ottawa after Premier Eby releases involuntary-care plan

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Prince George Mayor Simon Yu, from left to right, Delta Mayor George Harvie, District of North Vancouver Mayor, Mike Little, Port Coquitlam Mayor Brad West, and City of North Vancouver Mayor Linda Buchanan gather during a news conference in Vancouver, B.C., on Sept. 16. ETHAN CAIRNS/The Canadian Press

A coalition of B.C. leaders is calling for urgent action from the federal government to address what it calls public-safety and mental-health crises playing out across the province.

One day after B.C. Premier David Eby held a news conference at Vancouver City Hall to announce that his NDP government would introduce [involuntary care](#) for people with concurrent addiction, mental illness and acquired brain injuries, Vancouver Mayor Ken Sim stood at the same location, flanked by two-dozen B.C. leaders, calling for help from Ottawa. The full scope of Mr. Eby's plan would hinge on his party being re-elected in October's provincial election.

Mr. Sim said B.C. communities need funding to implement involuntary care beyond its current scope under B.C.'s Mental Health Act, [bail reform](#) for repeat offenders and a national plan to secure Metro Vancouver ports – “three critical fronts” also outlined in a letter sent to Mr. Eby and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

“Our current system has failed British Columbians and their families for decades,” Mr. Sim said Monday. “It has failed those who have been victims of random attacks, and it's failed those who have been struggling with severe mental-health and addiction challenges. And we can't afford to let this continue any longer.”

Other coalition members include Musqueam Indian Band Chief Wayne Sparrow; [Vancouver Fire Rescue Services](#) chief Karen Fry; Canadian Police Association president Tom Stamatakis; and the mayors of Burnaby, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Delta, Kelowna, North Vancouver, Pitt Meadows, Nanaimo, Prince George and the District of West Vancouver.

Vancouver Police Chief Adam Palmer said that while crime in the city is down across the board, that is “cold comfort to people who feel unsafe” when they hear of repeat offenders reoffending, or when innocent people are attacked by strangers experiencing psychosis.

Both the mayor and police chief referenced the case of [Brendan McBride](#), the 34-year-old White Rock man accused of killing one man and severing the hand of another in a knife attack in downtown Vancouver earlier this month.

“He was severely mentally ill and on probation with over 60 interactions with police when he committed the heinous acts that he did,” Mr. Sim said. “Right now, our system is failing to protect our residents by repeatedly allowing individuals with a history of violence and criminal behaviour back onto our streets. These offenders are responsible for a large portion of the crime in our communities.”

Of some 60 police interactions, Mr. McBride had only been charged with two other assaults before this month's gruesome attack. Audio recordings of court proceedings show that he had been apprehended under the Mental Health Act before and twice consented to psychiatric treatment, though the extent and duration of this care is unknown.

In recent years, Mr. McBride battled cocaine and alcohol addiction and sought help as his mental health deteriorated, his lawyers said. However, he was unable to secure an appointment with a public psychiatrist for months – exposing gaps in [B.C.](#)'s voluntary system of mental-health care.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), about 3 per cent of violent crime in Canada is related to mental illnesses, while about 7 per cent is related to substance-use problems.

People with serious mental illnesses are more likely to be victims of violence than the general population.

Jonny Morris, chief executive of the CMHA's B.C. division, said that there is a place for secure care if it is done in a way that complies with the law and treats people with dignity. However, he said that the province cannot avoid a mental-health crisis by detaining people, and cautioned against using the tool as a broad net.

"If the government is going to proceed with this plan, what we implore government to do is hold the community system to account with a robust analysis of where things fall apart in community mental-health care," Mr. Morris said.

"Have these individuals who have committed really awful crimes been given the help that they need in a timely fashion in the community mental-health setting?"