

News Release

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Kelowna Community Court taking next steps

Collaborative work with community stakeholders is beginning this fall to create a Community Court that has been approved in principle. Community Court was a key recommendation from [former Kelowna RCMP Supt. Bill McKinnon's 2018 crime reduction report](#) and the [Journey Home Strategy](#).

"A lot has changed in Kelowna since the previous Community Court," said The Honorable Geoffrey Barrow, Co-Chair of the Committee. "It's taken time to ensure there are enough support services in place and resources to ensure success of the model."

The Community Court (sometimes called an Integrated Court) will, as often as possible, have the same judge, prosecutor, probation officer, and care agency staff in the court.

The goal of a Community Court is to reduce crime and improve public safety by integrating justice, health and social services in an effort to address the root causes of criminal behaviour by those whose interactions with the criminal justice system are a result of their substance use, mental health issue, or housing challenges. An Integrated Court is designed to break the cycle of criminal justice involvement by:

- Allowing the court to be better informed about the offender's individual circumstances;
- Providing sentences that have a higher prospect of effecting some degree of rehabilitation; and
- More closely monitoring compliance with community supervision orders in part to ensure that those orders continue to address the offender's circumstances.

"The goal of an Integrated Community Court is to address gaps in the traditional court approach for people whose interactions with the criminal justice system are a result of their substance use, mental health or housing challenges," said Barrow. "The Court seeks to do that by connecting individuals with the supports they need in the community and by monitoring their circumstances while they are subject to community supervision."

John Howard Society is a proponent of the approach and supports programs that provide alternatives to the formal traditional justice system. Alternative justice supports address the harm caused by crime and holds people accountable for their actions while providing education and healing opportunities. While some supports include restorative practices, others may be more education-based, but all seek to inform members of our community about the impact of crime on victims, people who have committed an offence, and the wider community to prevent and address the harms caused by criminal behaviour.

"Community Court aims to achieve better outcomes for both people interfacing with the criminal system due to their individual vulnerabilities as well as the broader community through a more restorative approach to justice," John Howard Society Executive Director Patricia Bacon said. "By helping people lead healthier, more stable lives, the development of the Community Court represents another step to introduce measures to prevent homelessness in the first place."

The Court will focus primarily on offenders struggling with addiction, living with mental health issues or experiencing homelessness.

“Initiatives like Community Court are a key part of reducing crime, improving public safety, and providing integrated justice, health and social services to address the root causes of crime in Kelowna,” said Darren Caul, City of Kelowna Community Safety Director. “I’m so pleased to see this proposal moving forward with the province.”

The local Advisory Committee will start work with the Province and stakeholders as Kelowna Community Court now moves from a proposal stage, to an operational model.

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