

June 12, 2026

The Honourable David Eby
Premier of British Columbia
PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E1

Via email: premier@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier Eby:

Re: Urgent Request for Provincial Action and Partnership on the Cowichan Crisis

I am writing to request an urgent meeting with you to discuss how we can effectively work together to address the compounding homelessness, addictions, and mental health crisis affecting the Municipality of North Cowichan and the broader Cowichan region.

According to our most recent Point-in-Time Homeless Count, completed in the fall of 2025, there are 428 people experiencing homelessness in the Cowichan region, representing a significant increase from previous counts. Beyond the statistics, there is a profound human cost. Many of the individuals living in encampments are struggling with severe, untreated mental illness, substance use disorders, acquired brain injuries, and other complex health challenges. Too many families are watching loved ones cycle repeatedly through emergency rooms, shelters, the justice system, and the streets while waiting months for treatment. This is not a situation that can be solved through enforcement or temporary measures alone. People require sustained care, treatment, and stable housing.

These human tragedies translate into substantial impacts across our entire community. Many of our residential neighbourhoods are under immense pressure, and our local business owners are dealing with the daily realities of street disorder, property damage, vandalism, and safety concerns that directly threaten their livelihoods, staff safety, and customer traffic. Understandably, this has led to a growing sense of frustration and anxiety among residents and business owners who feel their overall quality of life, economic viability, and personal safety are being compromised.

Managing these challenges has placed an unsustainable financial burden on the Municipality of North Cowichan. We are currently spending nearly \$2 million annually to respond to these issues, which includes costs related to policing, bylaw enforcement, fire department responses, encampment cleanups, and related services. For a municipality with an annual operating budget of approximately \$70 million, this represents a disproportionate diversion of municipal resources. Despite facing a particularly

challenging year following the closure of the Crofton pulp mill and the resulting impact on our tax base, Council approved an additional \$260,000 in 2026 to mitigate these immediate pressures.

Local governments are doing everything within their authority to respond. We can manage encampments, provide sites for overnight sheltering as required by the courts, and support the development of emergency and supportive housing. However, the services most urgently needed—including addictions treatment, psychiatric care, long-term recovery services and complex-care facilities—fall squarely within provincial jurisdiction. Yet, municipalities are increasingly expected to manage the fallout of these challenges, without the authority, resources, or service mandates necessary to address their root causes.

Beyond the human toll, there is also a significant environmental cost. North Cowichan is currently dealing with many unsanctioned encampments within the Somenos Marsh Conservation Area, a 200-hectare ecosystem that includes critical wetlands, Garry Oak woodlands, Somenos Lake, and a historic Cowichan Tribes village site. These environmentally sensitive lands are experiencing severe, cumulative damage from waste, habitat degradation, and fire risk, which further underscores the need for provincial intervention to alleviate the pressure on our local ecosystems

Over the past four years, we have consistently raised these concerns with your government, meeting with members of your Cabinet, Island Health and BC Housing. While we appreciate the ongoing dialogue, our community has yet to see the level of action required to match the scale of the crisis.

The Municipality of North Cowichan stands ready to partner with you to advance practical solutions. Specifically, we are requesting that your government:

- **Re-open applications to the Heart and Hearth program.** North Cowichan is prepared to provide land for a village-style temporary housing community, but provincial capital and operating funding are urgently needed.
- **Repurpose the existing Cowichan District Hospital as a secure treatment facility** for individuals with complex mental health and addictions challenges. We were encouraged by a recent productive meeting at the site with your Special Advisor on Medicine, Psychiatry, and Addictions, Dr. Daniel Vigo, regarding the potential creation of new treatment beds there.
- **Provide funding for additional treatment and recovery beds** in the Cowichan region. The non-profit society Together We Can recently opened a new recovery facility in North Cowichan. While the facility currently offers 10 treatment beds, it has the infrastructure to expand to 20 subsidized beds with provincial support, cutting down lengthy waitlists.
- **Secure a facility for a new year-round shelter and daytime drop-in centre.** The existing Warmland Shelter funded by BC Housing does not have the capacity to meet local demand. Additional shelter space is vital if we are to safely reduce encampments while ensuring vulnerable individuals have access to appropriate care.

Every month that passes without additional treatment capacity and shelter space means greater pressure on our local government, further degradation of our environmentally sensitive areas, and worse outcomes for vulnerable people in our community.

We are asking your government to work with us to deliver measurable solutions that improve public safety, protect our environment, and save lives. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these requests.

Sincerely,



Rob Douglas
Mayor

mayor@northcowichan.ca

cc: Qwulti'stunaat - Debra Toporowski, MLA, Cowichan Valley
North Cowichan Council
Ted Swabey, CAO