



A Profile of Crime Prevention Initiatives in the City of Vancouver

This profile is part of a larger report entitled [Making Cities Safer: Canadian Strategies and Practices](#), which identifies themes and challenges in implementing community safety and crime prevention strategies in 14 municipalities across Canada. These 14 municipalities form the [Municipal Network on Crime Prevention](#) which is coordinated through the Institute for the Prevention of Crime at the University of Ottawa. This document profiles crime prevention initiatives in the City of Vancouver.

The City of Vancouver has a population just over 578,000 and it accounts for 14% of the total population of the Province of British Columbia. It is at the heart of a metropolitan area of more than 2 million people, with well over half of B.C.'s population living within the region. Given the population density within what is commonly called the Lower Mainland of B.C. (Vancouver CMA), it is important to think of Vancouver in this context, with both issues and policies transcending city boundaries. After a few years of declining population in the 1970s, Vancouver's population has been steadily growing. It is anticipated that by the year 2021 Vancouver could have a population of over 635,000 and that by 2031, the population could rise to more than 710,00, an increase of 18%. The city's land has been fully developed for many years. Population growth is accommodated in new housing created largely through redevelopment and infill. The City of Vancouver has a population density of 5,145 people per sq km, which is higher

than average compared to most major Canadian urban areas (Vancouver Foundation, 2006).

Population growth in the City of Vancouver comes largely from in migration within Canada as well as immigration from abroad. According to the 2006 Census, more than 45% of its population has originated from immigration. In 2006, 51% of the city's population identified themselves as visible minorities, compared to 49% in 2001 and 4.8% in 1996.

As the main western terminus of Canada's transcontinental highway and rail routes, Vancouver is the primary city of western Canada, as well as one of the nation's largest industrial centres. It is the gateway to the Asia-Pacific region, as well as a renowned tourist destination. The Port of Vancouver is Canada's largest and most diversified harbour. Employment in Vancouver has been growing steadily over the last 30 to 40 years but there have been dramatic changes in the types of jobs. Traditional heavy industries have declined while new jobs in personal and business services have expanded sharply. Downtown Vancouver continues to be the most important regional location for business and major institutions.

As other large Canadian cities, Vancouver is confronted with challenges regarding affordable housing and the social integration of the most vulnerable people. In 2006, 52% of the dwellings in the City of Vancouver were rented and 48% were owned. In recent years, housing demand has risen while supply has tightened, leading to escalating housing prices and rents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of Vancouver

	Population ¹	Population Change 2001-2006 (%) ¹	15-24 year olds (%) ¹	Recent immigrants* (%) ¹	Aboriginal peoples (%) ¹	Visible minorities (%) ¹	Low income** - after tax (%) ¹	Unemployment rate ²	Mobility*** ¹	Lone parent families (%) ¹	Dwellings requiring repair (%) ¹	Households in core housing need (%) ³
Vancouver	578,041	5.9	12.8	7.6	0.2	51.0	21.4	4.1	4.8	16.2	7.9	17.3
Canada	31,612,897	5.4	13.4	3.6	3.8	16.2	11.4	6.3	1.9	15.9	7.5	13.7

¹ 2006 Census, Community Profiles, Statistics Canada.

² Labour Force Survey, Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 282-0054 - LFS estimates, by economic regions, 3-month moving average, unadjusted for seasonality, monthly (persons), May 2007. Unemployment rates refer to corresponding economic regions and not for specific municipalities.

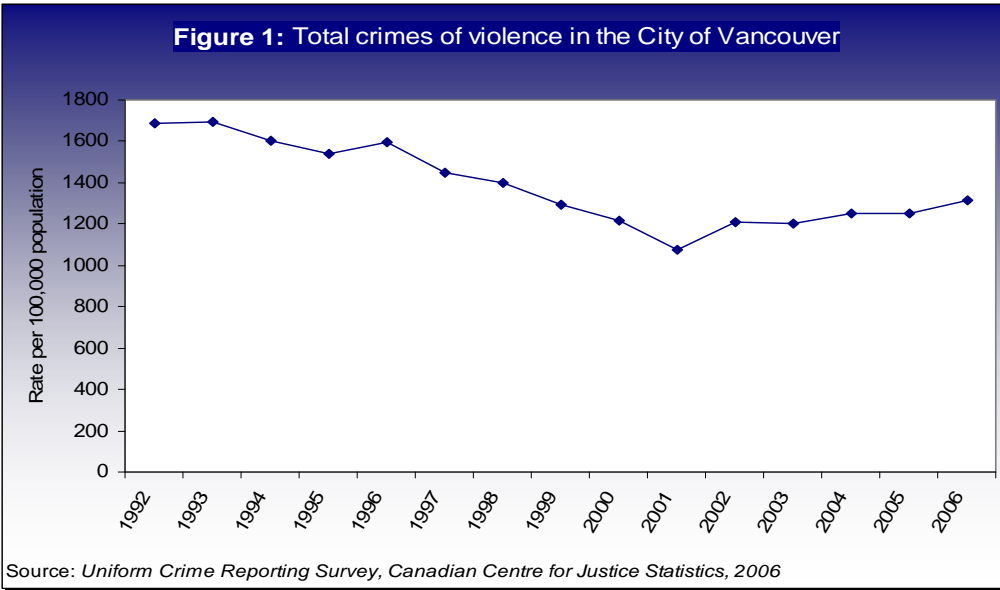
³ 2001 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Census Metropolitan Area data only.

* Proportion of the population who immigrated to Canada between 2001 and 2006

** Refers to the position of an economic family or a person 15 years and over not in an economic family in relation to Statistics Canada's low income after-tax cut-offs.

*** Proportion that live in a different province, territory or country 1 year previous to Census year

Figure 1: Total crimes of violence in the City of Vancouver



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2006

In 2001, Vancouver had the highest proportion of households of any metropolitan area in Canada that pay 30% or more of their income on shelter. There has also been significant growth in the number of homeless in the City of Vancouver. Between 2002 and 2005 the number of homeless persons increased 106% from 628 to 1,291 – 74% of those enumerated reported having one or more health conditions (i.e. addiction, medical condition, mental illness, or physical disability) (SPARC BC, 2005)

According to the 2006 Census over 1 in 5 persons (21.4%) lived below the after-tax Low Income Cut-Off in 2001. Vancouver’s lowest-income neighbourhoods are located downtown.

Crime trends and challenges

After a general decline between 1992 and 2001, the City of Vancouver has experienced a rise in the rate of violent crimes of since 2002 (Figure 1).

With regard to property crimes, there has been a steady decline during the last 10 years after a peak reached in 1996 (Figure 2). Yet according to police-reported statistics, Vancouver holds the highest break & enter

rates in all large metropolitan areas of Canada, suspected to be fuelled by the drug trade.

Street and sexual related violence, property crime induced in particular by drug addiction, gangs and gun violence as well as street disorder, including aggressive panhandling, graffiti, open-air drug markets and sleeping in public places, have been identified as key issues in the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan of the Vancouver Police Department. It is estimated that 8,000 injection drug users live in Vancouver, with approximately 4,700 living in

Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (Vancouver Foundation, 2006), a neighbourhood plagued with concentrated drug, crime and social challenges.

History of engagement in crime prevention

In 1991, City Council established a Safer City Task Force that tabled its final report in 1993, containing some 285 recommendations. The report examined safety and urban design, domestic violence and violence in schools. It stressed the importance of involving citizens in efforts to improve safety and reduce crime. It also suggested ways of designing safer environments through simple measures that ensure informal surveillance. Council followed by instructing civic departments and commissions to include in their workplans the issues raised in the report. These included particular issues related to support for disadvantaged people (including children and youth at risk, immigrants and refugees, victims of domestic violence and elder abuse, and people with disabilities), physical infrastructure and design, as well as for better neighbourhood development. In 1994, an Interim Advisory Commission on Safer City Initiatives was set up with

Number of offences recorded by the Vancouver Police Service in 2006

Homicide	19
Physical assault	6,047
Sexual assault	395
Breaking and entering	8,431
Motor vehicle theft	3,700

Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2006

the mandate to propose strategies and policies and to liaise with the City Manager’s office on the follow-up to the report.

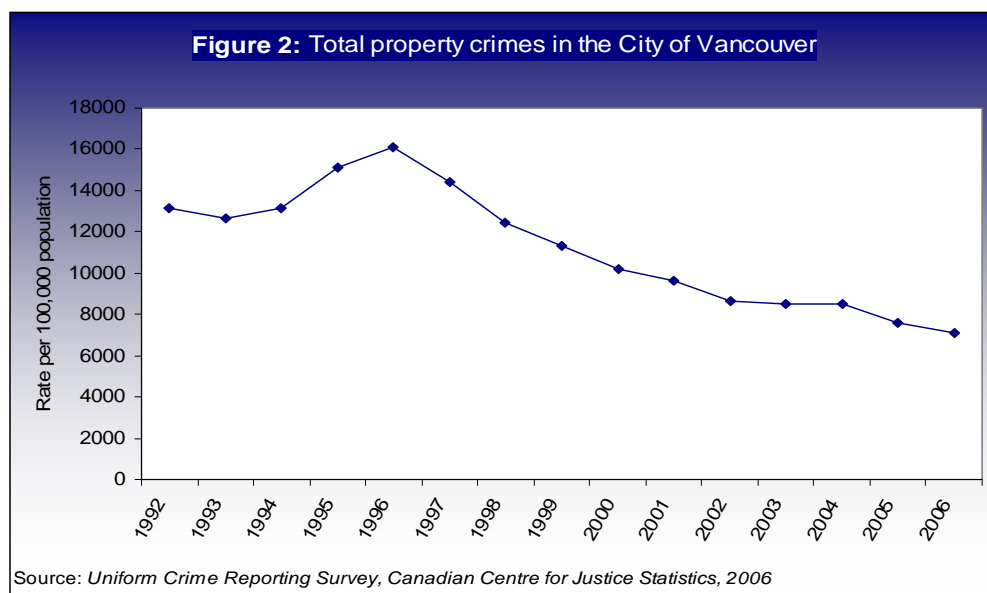
In partnership with the British Columbia Ministry of the Attorney General, a Community Safety Funding Program with an annual allocation of \$150,000 from the City and the same from the Province was created in 1996. This programme was instrumental in supporting different crime prevention initiatives, including the development of community policing centres (see text box). The annual financial contribution from the Province to the programme was maintained until the end of 2002.

of recommendations on ways the federal, provincial and municipal governments as well as individual citizens could contribute to combat this problem

In 2000, the *Vancouver Agreement* (see box) between the federal government, the province of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver was signed to develop and implement a coordinated strategy to promote health and safety throughout the city. It acknowledged that a comprehensive drug strategy must be linked to housing, employment, and social and economic development.

In 2001, the City proposed a Framework for Action with the purpose to:

- Provide the City of Vancouver and its citizens with a framework for action that compels the provincial and federal governments to take responsibility for issues within their jurisdiction
- Demonstrate which levels of government are responsible for actions to achieve the goals in the framework
- Clarify Vancouver’s drug problems and establish appropriate, achievable goals and actions.



In 1996, a Mayor’s Urban Safety Commission was set up in order to look at ways other levels of government could be encouraged to work with the City to solve urban safety problems. The following year, the serious drug problems in the city, in particular in the Downtown Eastside, led to the creation of Vancouver’s Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment, under the leadership of the Urban Safety Commission. The Coalition brought together a diverse cross section of institutional and community partners committed to taking actions to address this complex issue. It launched an extensive consultation process related to possible approaches to drug addiction and property crime, as well as public forums on a “continuum of care” approach to drug treatment.

In 1997, the Vancouver Board of Trade issued the report of its Task Force on property crime that had been established the previous year. It contained a series

This *Four-Pillar Approach to Drug Problems in Vancouver* (see box) integrates both a public order and a public health perspective. It rests on: (1) prevention; (2) treatment; (3) harm reduction and; (4) enforcement. Since 2003, a Four Pillars Coalition continues to bring together a large group of concerned local businesses, public agencies and NGOs as a forum for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between the community, the Mayor and Council and City staff. Community safety is an important part of its mandate.

Current vision, coordination, and partnerships

The current approach of the City of Vancouver in relation with urban safety and crime prevention issues is characterized by an integrated vision of urban revitalization and development with strong social

planning elements and by a clear wish to work together with other institutional and community stakeholders.

The key elements of the approach are:

- *Coordination* between civic departments, with the three levels of government and with community residents, agencies and groups
- *Strategic targeting* of government resources, marginal groups and service gaps
- *Community and partnership building*, involving increasing the understanding, building acceptance, developing appreciation for diversity and collaboration between the community, governments, foundations and the private sector.

The responsibility centre for urban safety rests with the City's Manager Office where an Assistant City Manager is in charge of this portfolio. This allows for effective inter-departmental collaboration and strategic liaison with external partners and stakeholders. Internally, Community Services is the key umbrella service that includes the Social Planning Department, the Housing Centre and the Planning Department.

The Vancouver Agreement

The Vancouver Agreement is an urban initiative that promotes partnerships between governments, community organizations and business to make the city a healthy, safe and economically and socially sustainable place to live and work for all residents. Signed in 2000 for a five-year term by the governments of Canada and British Columbia and the City of Vancouver, it has been renewed until 2010.

The first focus has been the Downtown Eastside because of the serious economic, social and public safety challenges found in this community. The goals are to increase economic development in the area, to improve the health of area residents and to increase public safety.

Four strategies, each with an array of projects and initiatives, were developed to achieve these goals:

- Economic development and job creation.
- Dismantle the area's open drug scene.
- Turn problem hotels, particularly those that offer single-room-occupancy housing into safe, clean places to live.
- Make the community safer for the most vulnerable, particularly women, youth and children.

Additional priorities identified in the second phase of the agreement are the 2010 Inner-City Inclusivity Initiative, in partnership with the Olympic Committee, and the Accessible/Inclusive Cities and Communities Project.

Source: www.vancouveragreement.ca

Initiatives and achievements

In the last few years, major initiatives have been undertaken or spearheaded by the City of Vancouver with regard to urban safety and crime prevention.

Revitalization of the Downtown Eastside

This inner-city neighbourhood is home to some 16,000 residents and has been plagued since the 1990's with a public health epidemic of injection drug use that has resulted in a fast social and economic decline, with street disorder and homelessness as well as sexual exploitation of vulnerable groups (women, First Nations and youth).

The revitalization programme of the Downtown Eastside calls for:

- City initiatives such as infrastructure and service improvement as well as policy development
- Community development and crime prevention projects to foster capacity building and local leadership
- The Vancouver Agreement based on partnerships and intergovernmental cooperation
- A policy framework for the drug problem and a large coalition of stakeholders.

A Community Monitoring Report has been published on an annual basis since 1996 to measure progress. Indicators cover issues such as housing, community services, health, development and projects, crime and enforcement. Initiatives have included:

- The opening in 2003 of the first legal supervised injection facility in North America where on-site nurses and counsellors provide access and referral to addiction treatment services, primary health care and mental health supports
- The adoption in 2003 of the Single Room Accommodation By-law in order to regulate the rate of change in the supply of low income housing in the downtown core
- A net gain of 85 non-market housing units mainly for low-income residents between 1995 and 2005

- The setting up of heritage incentive programmes aimed at facilitating the conservation and rehabilitation of heritage buildings.

Drug Policy Program

As mentioned above, the Four Pillars Drug Strategy (www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars) is a comprehensive, integrated strategy for addressing illegal drug use and the drug trade in Vancouver, particularly in the Downtown Eastside (see above). Four main partners at the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government are responsible for coordination and implementation of the Four Pillars Drug Strategy: the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Agreement (see above), Vancouver Coastal Health and the Vancouver Police Department. The Four Pillars Coalition is a partnership of more than 60 organizations dedicated to the four pillars approach in the City of Vancouver. It includes members from the private sector, the public sector as well as non-profit and non-governmental organizations and individual.



As part of this joint effort, the City of Vancouver is responsible for a range of services that contribute to community and individual well-being and support four pillars implementation, including:

- Community centres, neighbourhood houses and programs in the downtown core
- Affordable housing initiatives (including funding for social housing)
- Community, safety and public order, through funding to the Vancouver Police Department
- Enforcement of building, zoning and business by-laws to reduce the impact of drug trafficking and businesses that depend on the drug trade.

The Vancouver Police Department is primarily responsible for the enforcement pillar of the Drug Strategy, in coordination with the other partners. In particular, it:

- Targets organized crime, drug dealing and drug houses and problem businesses involved in the drug trade

- Improves coordination with health services and other agencies that link drug users to withdrawal management (detox), treatment, counselling and prevention services.

In 2005, the City of Vancouver's Drug Policy Program released the drug policy prevention plan, *Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use* that was endorsed by City Council. The Plan is the result of extensive research and diverse community consultations. It is based on the best evidence and research available. It sets five prevention priorities:

- Risk and Protection Across the Life Course
- Community Centred Prevention
- Addressing the Impacts on Communities
- Legislative and Public Policy Change
- Regulated Markets

The Four-Pillar Approach to Drug Problems in Vancouver

Prevention

- Promoting healthy families and communities, protecting child and youth development, preventing or delaying the start of substance use among young people and reducing harm associated with substance use. Successful prevention efforts aim to improve the health of the general population and reduce differences in health between groups of people.

Treatment

- Offering individuals access to services that help people come to terms with problem substance use and lead healthier lives, including outpatient and peer-based counseling, methadone programs, daytime and residential treatment, housing support and ongoing medical care.

Harm Reduction

- Reducing the spread of deadly communicable diseases, preventing drug overdose deaths, increasing substance users' contact with health care services and drug treatment programs and reducing consumption of drugs in the street.

Enforcement

- Recognizing the need for peace and quiet, public order and safety in the Downtown Eastside and other Vancouver neighbourhoods by targeting organized crime, drug dealing, drug houses, problem businesses involved in the drug trade, and improving coordination with health services and other agencies that link drug users to withdrawal management (detox), treatment, counseling and prevention services.

Source: www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars

Neighbourhood Integrated Service Teams

Introduced in 1994, the Neighbourhood Integrated Service Teams (NIST) are composed of City and other community agency employees working across organizational boundaries to help communities solve problems. The teams include libraries, recreation

centres, community-based policing, fire halls, planning, inspections, garbage collection as well as representatives from external agencies such as the Vancouver School Board and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. Their goals are to:

- Create safer and more pleasant neighbourhoods
- Provide effective and friendly services
- Involve the community in creative problem solving
- Facilitate access to information about the City and its government.

More than 200 City staff work on 16 teams, each of which represents a particular area of the city. Parks that have become active areas for drugs and prostitution, problematic houses resulting in noise, drugs, violence and break-ins in the neighbourhood, vacant houses attracting squatters generating unsafe needles disposal and garbage accumulation are some examples of situations that are addressed by NIST. The City of Vancouver has won in 2003 an award from the United Nations Public Service Awards for this initiative.

Community Policing Centres

The City of Vancouver has had in place for quite some time an innovative community policing model, which is based on a network of Community Policing Centres (CPC). CPCs vary in size, hours of operation, programs, staff and volunteer involvement. They are run by non-profit societies and have in place boards of directors, which are made up of local residents. There are 9 CPCs in Vancouver, including a Chinese centre and an Aboriginal centre. Each Centre receives an annual budget allocation of \$100,000. In 2006 it was estimated that CPCs contributed a total of over 94,000 volunteer hours to the city.

Initiated in 1995, the number of CPCs has rapidly grown from four to 18 centres in 2003. The centres benefited from the support of the Community Safety Funding Program set in 1996 jointly by the City of Vancouver and the British Columbia Ministry of the Attorney General (see above). When the Province decided to pull out of the funding agreement in 2002, the City of Vancouver maintained its commitment to the CPCs and restructured them.

Vancouver's Community Policing Centres provide a broad array of services and assistance both to the general public and to the Department. Besides offering crime prevention information, community forums and neighbourhood patrols, the Centres allow police

members to interact with the community in an informal environment. The public can report concerns or issues to the police members who are assigned to the Centres, or who happen to be passing through and to discuss problem premises or crimes in the area. Moreover, members use the Centres around the clock, write reports or take meal breaks, thus keeping them closer to their beats and better able to respond to calls for service.

The Collingwood Community Policing Centre

The Joyce Station Area Planning Association first opened the Collingwood Community Policing Centre in April of 1994 to serve the Collingwood-Renfrew Area. This was an innovative form of community policing aiming at bridging the gap between the local community, the city of Vancouver, and the Vancouver Police Department. The Centre works closely with the police, police, residents, local businesses and community organizations.

The goal of the office to educate people in order to empower individuals to take responsibility for crime prevention in the community. Currently the Centre has over 100 volunteers.

Among the various programmes run by the Centre, it is worth mentioning:

- The *Adopt-A-Block* programme to combat litter in the streets and keep the area attractive.
- The *Collingwood Guardians Program* involves patrols by Guardians aimed not only at reducing and deterring crime in the business areas of Collingwood, but to address other issues such as panhandling, loitering, and suspicious activity.
- The *Community Outreach* programmes that empower residents by educating them in crime prevention.
- The *Drug Awareness* programme
- The *Garden Watch* programme that encourages people to get outside and be more active through gardening.
- *Foot and Bike Patrols*
- The *Seniors Safe Tea* Programme is intended to educate seniors on safety and ways to protect themselves.

Source: www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/police

CPTED Promotion

The City of Vancouver through its Development Planning Centre and its Police Department has developed over the years an expertise in applying the principles of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). The Police, in coordination with planners, provide comments on all rezoning and major development applications. This is in addition to comments provided by the Police for conditional uses such as billiard halls, video arcades and liquor license remises. Safer design considerations have also been incorporated into many initiatives including bicycle

parking policies, Greenways and CityPlan. This covers the review of applications from developers and specific issues such as parking garages, exits, street interface and alcoves.

Civic Youth Strategy

In 1995, the City of Vancouver adopted a Civic Youth Strategy (www.vancouveryouth.ca). Through this initiative, the City expressed its commitment to supporting youth and involving them in decision-making. It engages youth and youth-driven organizations as active partners in the development, assessment and delivery of civic services that directly impact on youth. The Strategy includes youth in broad-spectrum consultations and initiatives on civic issues. The implementation of the Strategy is ongoing work that involves translating policy, objectives and principles of the Civic Youth Strategy into action.



In 2003, the City recognized the distinct experience and expertise youth would contribute to bringing the Civic Youth Strategy policy document to life. City Council funded the hiring of a team of youth as City staff, the *Youth Outreach Team*, reaffirming that youth are a valuable resource to the municipality. The Team's mandate is to increase meaningful youth participation in City decision-making by:

- Providing expertise on youth engagement to other City staff for their work that has a mandate to engage all citizens, including youth
- Acting as a bridge between City staff, youth (aged 13-24) and youth organizations
- Functioning as “guides” for youth to access the municipal system
- Bringing together City staff and youth to address issues or to work on projects of mutual interest.

The Youth Outreach Team (YOT) and the City's Drug Policy Program have been working to develop a youth

component of the City's Drug Use Prevention Strategy. YOT's role in this work includes training youth to facilitate dialogue sessions on prevention in their communities, working to develop a youth-friendly version of the draft plan, *Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use* (see above) and developing a youth engagement strategy to address the plan's recommendations.

Project Civil City

Project Civil City (www.vancouver.ca/projectcivilcity) was launched at the end of 2006 by the Mayor and a Councillor of Vancouver in order to determine the specific steps and actions that can be undertaken by the City to respond to the growing concern about street disorder in the community. The initiative was based on a series of round table discussions with community stakeholders, on the findings from a web-based survey and on consultations with service providers.

Using the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games as a catalyst, the Mayor intends to unite the community and government to improve public order, reduce the impacts of crime and leave a social and human legacy that will benefit future generations. This initiative is designed to restore the public's sense of personal safety, promote civic pride and encourage personal responsibility through incremental change.

The four goals of Project Civil city as adopted by the Vancouver City council are to realize the following changes by 2010:

- Increase housing opportunities and eliminate homelessness, with at least a 50% reduction
- Eliminate the open drug market on Vancouver's streets, with at least a 50% reduction
- Eliminate the incidence of aggressive panhandling with at least a 50% reduction
- Increase the level of public satisfaction with the City's handling of public nuisance and annoyance complaints by 50% by 2010.

The project team works in collaboration with other levels of government, organizations and with local communities to identify and tackle issues of concern, promote best practices for addressing complex social issues, engage stakeholders in joint initiatives and track progress through evaluative measures. One of the key issues is the need to raise awareness and convene government, community and business partnerships to

address complex social issues, beyond the City's mandate and resources, particularly challenging when dealing with the serious underlying problems of poverty, mental illness and drug addiction.

Most recently, Project Civil City has been involved in the promotion and implementation of a number of specific initiatives that collectively will impact on the goals as well as contribute to community safety. These include:

- The expansion of the Ambassador Program that provide assistance to business owners, customers, residents and visitors to the downtown and other strategic areas as well as to street individuals requiring assistance and/or referrals to service agencies
- The launch of a Crime Free Multi-Housing Program that emphasizes the reduction and elimination of illegal and nuisance activity in apartment buildings, through education and training and that builds relationships and trust among apartment owners, managers, residents, police and city departments
- The Clean Streets initiative linked to a range of other target community revitalization projects, focused on the Downtown eastside area

- Increased collaboration regarding mental health, drug addiction and homeless strategy for Vancouver
- The review of legal and enforcement strategies and tools
- The engagement of the Province in relation with the coordination around housing and mental health service provision, including Single Room Occupancy restoration.

Success factors

Confronted with interlinked urban safety and social challenges, the City of Vancouver has brought multisectoral and integrated responses to those difficult problems through effective leadership, mobilization of stakeholders, coordination of services and interventions as well as community involvement and participation. Those issues are addressed on a continuous basis by the political authorities and the senior management of the City.

The City has put in place innovative mechanisms and programmes such as the NIST and the Community Policing Centres. It has developed a comprehensive response to the drug and urban decay challenges in the city centre. It has set ambitious goals to improve urban safety and the quality of life of the citizens in the next few years, affirming a clear political vision.

Sources

- Cooper, Merrill (2006) *Social Sustainability in Vancouver*. Research Report F|62 Family Network, September 2006. Canadian Policy Research Networks. Ottawa.
- City of Vancouver Website
www.city.vancouver.bc.ca
- Social Planning and Research Council of BC. (2005). *On our streets and in our shelters ... Results of the 2005 Greater Vancouver Homeless Count*. SPARC BC. Vancouver.
- Project Civil City
www.vancouver.ca/projectcivilcity
- Vancouver Foundation (2006). *Vital Signs Vancouver 2006*.
- Vancouver Police Department (2008). *Vancouver Police Department 2008-2012 Strategic Plan*.
<http://vancouver.ca/police/StratPlan/StrategicPlan08.pdf>