

# Mental health committee urges Kits centre mobility

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Mental health crises don't go home at midnight, the citizens' advisory committee for the planned new Kitsilano community mental health centre warned Tuesday.

The 50-member committee voted unanimously to press the provincial government for a short-stay crisis residence to provide overnight and longer accommodation for individuals who are suffering severe mental distress.

The recommendation is for an eight-bed facility to be established in a renovated residential house in Kitsilano, but committee members said the need in Kitsilano is for at least three times that number of beds.

Lanny Beckman said the Mental Patients Association's drop-in centre in Kitsilano has to turn away four or five individuals nightly.

"These people are not together enough to get some place to live or something to eat, and they wind up walking the streets or sleeping on the beach," said Beckman.

"One of the most frustrating things is running a drop-in centre and having to turn people out at the end of the night."

Another committee member cited the example of an elder-

ly man who turned up at a Kitsilano drop-in centre the previous night in such a state of disorientation that he had sold his \$12 welfare food voucher for \$4. The centre staff managed to find a bed for him on the North Shore — but they had to drive him there at 2 a.m.

Several committee members emphasized that the residence should be designed to serve all age groups — and not be solely youth-oriented.

"We should get away from calling it a hostel, because a lot of older people associate that with hippies," said one member.

"You might get a guy who's freaking out because he's found his kid's on smack (heroin), and the last thing he needs is to walk into a place and find a long-haired freak lying on a bed."

The planned mental health community centre, which may get under way in three months, is meant to decentralize mental health services and substitute small, familiar neighborhood clinics for Riverview mental hospital.

The Kitsilano undertaking is part of the new Greater Vancouver Mental Health Project, which eventually plans to operate eight community outpatient clinics as the first ex-

periment of its kind in Canada.

Responsibility for the clinics resides with the Metropolitan Board of Health, a body of municipal politicians and medical health officers.

But the Kitsilano advisory committee — which represents such groups as the Kitsilano Information Centre, Kitsilano Area Resources Council, MPA, SPEC and the Vancouver Legal Referral Service — has been battling with the government to ensure citizens participation in planning and running the clinics.

Committee spokesman Jeff Marvin told the meeting that the committee had been seeking citizen membership on the Metropolitan Health Planning and Advisory Board, one of the governmental overseeing bodies.

"There are no citizens on that board now," said Marvin. "We asked for membership and they appointed a committee to look into citizen participation."

"It's a new type of personnel that we need, people more involved in their community than is usual with mental health workers," said Marvin. "They have to be familiar with the resources of the community, where to get jobs, welfare, housing."