

# DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT POLICE RESPONSE TO LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE



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## The Crime Reduction Research Program

The Crime Reduction Research Program (CRRP) is the joint-research model in British Columbia between academics, the provincial government, and police agencies operated by the Office of Crime Reduction – Gang Outreach. The CRRP is supported and informed by a Crime Reduction Research Working Group which includes representation from the Ministry of Public Safety Solicitor General (represented by Community Safety and Crime Prevention Branch and Police Services Branch), the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit of British Columbia and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police “E” Division.

The CRRP focuses on investing in research that can be applied to support policing operations and informing evidence-based decisions on policies and programs related to public safety in British Columbia. Each year, the CRRP reviews submissions of research proposals in support of this mandate. The CRRP Working Group supports successful proposals by working with researchers to refine the study design as necessary, provide or acquire necessary data for projects, and advise on the validity of data interpretation and the practicality of recommendations.

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## Executive Summary

In Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) detachments and municipal police departments across British Columbia, the largest proportion of calls for service are considered lower priority calls, commonly referred to as Priority 3 and Priority 4 calls (De Jager, 2021). For the most part, Priority 1 calls are dispatched immediately and officers travel to the scene with emergency lights and siren active. Priority 2 calls also involve a rapid response from the police, but where the immediate threat to a person's safety or property is considered limited. Priority 3 calls do not require active emergency lights and sirens, are typically viewed as less serious, and are typically responded to after all Priority 1 and 2 calls have been cleared. Priority 4 calls are those that do not require the attendance of police, but may be responded to if, or when, there is sufficient time, such as nuisance calls, abandoned vehicle, or the report of a disturbance. Importantly, a police response to a call for service, even if a lower priority call, is expensive and consumes police resources and time.

Lower priority calls for service commonly involve some forms of traffic incidents, such as speeding or erratic driving where the caller no longer has visual contact with the violating vehicle offences, minor motor vehicle incidents, thefts, public nuisance complaints, a non-violent disturbance, suspicious persons, suspicious circumstances, and non-emergency assist police/fire/ambulance. While these types of calls typically do not require an immediate police response, the ways in which the police address these calls can have a substantial effect on the public's perception of their local police, the responsiveness of the police to the community, and public satisfaction with their police, to say nothing of the level of resources that a police agency spends on these types of calls.

The two main objectives of this project are to identify the nature and quantity of lower priority calls for service in RCMP Detachments located across the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The second purpose is to identify what is considered the most effective and efficient strategies and practices for the police to respond to the volume of lower priority calls for service. By providing an assessment of the various practices, methods, models, and philosophies that are currently being employed by different police agencies, this project will provide an overall assessment and recommendations designed to improve the quality and efficacy of RCMP efforts to respond to lower priority calls for service.

In 2019 and in 2020, there were over 1.84 million calls for service to 9-1-1 in British Columbia, Canada. This volume of calls of service represented an increase from nearly 1.6 million calls in 2018 and almost 1.5 million calls in 2017 (E-Comm 9-1-1, 2020). Of the calls for service in 2019, 71% were police related (E-Comm 9-1-1, 2020). The 2019 annual E-Comm report showed that out of the 1.84 million calls to 9-1-1, 699,911 were for non-emergency police services (38 per cent), and 610,141 were for emergency police services (33 per cent). This volume of calls represents a 7% increase in the total number of calls for service in 2019 compared to 2018 statistics. Recognizing police call for service trends is important for understanding the burden on British Columbian police departments (E-Comm 9-1-1, 2019). The upward trend in calls for service has occurred nationwide as Statistics Canada reported 13.5 million calls for service across Canada in 2018 and 2019, a 6% increase from 2017. A substantial proportion of these calls, ranging from 50% to 80%, involved responses to incidents that were non-criminal, including disturbances, alarms, or wellbeing checks (see Mazowita & Rotenberg, 2019). Past research using RCMP data showed a steady increase in

service calls and a decline in response times and case completion over a 30-year period in British Columbia (Malm et al., 2005). Although these trends coincide with population increases, British Columbia trails behind many other provinces in Canada regarding police officer to population ratio (Malm et al., 2005, Statistics Canada, 2019).

The objectives of this project were achieved through quantitative and qualitative research methods. An important part of framing the discussion about how best to address lower priority calls for service is to have a good understanding of the nature and quantity of these calls in a sample of Lower Mainland RCMP Detachments and municipal police departments. To achieve this, researchers worked with RCMP “E” Division Operations Strategy Branch (OSB) to obtain data on the number and nature of lower priority calls for service for all RCMP Detachments and municipal police departments in British Columbia for 2018, 2019, and 2020. The data was analysed in the aggregate, by year, and in each of the four RCMP districts (Lower Mainland, Island, North, and South-East). Municipal police departments were included in the district level analyses. In addition, Interviews were conducted with selected supervisors in the Operations sections of a sample of Lower Mainland RCMP Detachments and municipal police departments. In total, of the 23 RCMP detachments and municipal police departments in the Lower Mainland District, 12 RCMP detachments and municipal departments participated in interviews for this study. From these 12 policing agencies, 30 participants agreed to be interviewed for this project. All participants had extensive experience responding to calls for service and most were currently in positions where they managed or supervised members, teams, or units that responded to calls for service. Other participants were in senior management or leadership positions, including District Commanders or Officers in Charge.

In 2018, there were 1,753,559 calls for service in British Columbia. Of these calls for service, 56.6% were from the Lower Mainland District, 16.3% were from the South-East District, 9.5% were from the North District, and 17.6% were from the Island District. In the Lower Mainland District, which is the focus of this report, Priority 3 and 4 calls for service accounted for 614,538 or 61.9% of all calls for service in the Lower Mainland in 2018. The most common Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2018 in the Lower Mainland District were for theft (n = 63,664), property (n = 44,407), traffic incident (n = 38,673), assist general public (n = 37,240), unwanted person (n = 29,866), and disturbance (n = 29,732). In effect, these six call types (n = 243,562) accounted for 39.6% of all Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in the Lower Mainland District in 2018.

In 2019, there were 1,801,532 calls for service in British Columbia. This represented a 2.7% increase in the total number of calls for service compared to 2018. Of the total number of calls for service in 2019, 56.7% were from the Lower Mainland District, 16.2% were from the South-East District, 9.6% were from the North District, and 17.6% were from the Island District; nearly an identical distribution as found in 2018. In the Lower Mainland District, Priority 3 and 4 calls for service accounted for 628,931 or 62.4% of all calls for service in the district in 2019. Given this, there was a 2.4% increase in the total number of Priority 3 and 4 calls for service compared to 2018 or an additional 14,393 Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2019 compared to the previous year. The most common Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2019 in the Lower Mainland District were the same as in the previous year.

In 2020, there were 1,697,396 calls for service in British Columbia. This represented a 5.8% decrease in the total number of calls for service compared to 2019. This decrease should not be surprising given the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the total number of calls for service in 2020, 56.0% were from the Lower Mainland District, 16.9% were from the South-East District, 9.8% were from the North District, and 17.5% were from the Island District; nearly an identical distribution as found in the previous two years. In the Lower Mainland District, Priority 3 and 4 calls for service accounted for 580,955 or 62.4% of all calls for service in the district in 2020. Given this, there was a decrease of 7.6% in the total number of Priority 3 and 4 calls for service compared to the previous year. The most common Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2020 in the Lower Mainland District were generally the same as in the previous year.

The general view among participants in this study was that there was consistency across the various police agencies that participated in this study about what constituted a lower priority call for service. What changed definitionally and operationally was the nature of the response to these types of calls based on the number of officers available to respond, the volume of calls for service at any given time, and the general expectations of the public. While some police agencies were, in practice, a 'no call too small' organisation, others have accepted the reality that while ideally every call for service would result in a police officer attending the scene or meeting face-to-face with the complainant, this was simply not possible given the volume of calls for service and the nature of those calls. Each police agency developed their own Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to respond to calls for service that aligned with the nature and quantity of calls for service, as well as public expectations.

Of those participants who stated that they could provide a relatively accurate estimate, the range of lower priority calls for service received by their agency was from 50% to 80% with most participants indicating that it was likely around 70% of all calls for service to their police agency were lower priority. When discussing the changing nature of calls for service, several themes emerged. The first theme, which was mentioned by all participants, was the increased number of calls for service where the primary or driving factor was mental health, addiction, and/or homelessness related. Some policing organisations reported success in the development of multi-agency partnerships, including with mental health, addictions, BC Housing, Fraser Health, and bylaw with an aim to effectively address the chronic social issues that resulted in numerous calls for service related to a specific individual in the community over time. Across all participating police agencies, participants suggested that the availability of a mental health nurse to respond to calls for service with a police officer (e.g., Car 67, 80, 87) offered a significant improvement in service, noting that mental health nurses were the qualified medical professionals with the training and skills to appropriately respond to individuals in crisis.

Also related to addictions and mental health were the increasing number of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) calls for service. Participants expressed concern that IPV had become rampant, but because it was an offence that was not visible to everyone, it was not receiving the necessary attention in prevention and intervention. Finally, participants noted that there has been a shift over time in the volatility inherent in responding to lower priority calls for service, suggesting that very mundane calls that were initially coded as Priority 3 or 4 could quickly escalate to use of force

situations, which was attributed to the increase in calls for service that involved a subject who was suffering from addictions or a mental health issue.

Given the different police agencies that participants worked in, some participants indicated that they sent at least one police officer to every call for service. However, even when this was not possible given the volume of calls for service and the number of police officers on a shift, some participants indicated that if a complainant called several times about the same issue and was very upset, even for a lower priority issue from the perspective of the police, they would dispatch an officer. It should be noted that most participants stated that public perception of a responsive police agency that responded to and interacted with the community was extremely important, perhaps more so than in the past. Given this, whenever possible, sending a police officer to speak and interact with a complainant, even if the officer was not going to be able to do anything about the issue, was viewed as an important part of building and maintaining trust and a positive relationship with the community.

Phoning the complainant back to explain why an officer had not yet attended or that an officer would not attend and having an online reporting system are two ways to address the inability to send an officer to every lower priority call for service. Many participants spoke about how younger people were much more comfortable talking with an officer over the phone, using some type of messaging or text application on their phone, or interacting through email rather than talking to the police face-to-face. A phone call also provided an opportunity for a supervisor to triage a lower priority call for service prior to sending an officer to attend the scene. This opportunity should be used to gauge the nature of the call and assess the most appropriate response. In effect, when used, participants viewed checking in with the complainant as assisting in delivering the best possible service, provided an opportunity for the watch commander or supervisor to ask probing questions to properly triage the call for service, and increased the satisfaction of the complainant as they were not waiting for a police officer to attend with no update or feedback from the police.

Participants from larger police agencies reported that they could assign a few officers from each shift or those on modified duty to just attend appointments that were typically associated with collecting non-perishable evidence, such as video evidence from a business, residence, vehicle dashboard camera, or a doorbell camera. Participants reported that simply from a customer service perspective, setting a time and place that an officer would come to collect evidence and speak to the complainant was perceived as being very valuable to the complainant, in addition to being very efficient from a policing perspective.

All participants indicated that online reporting was used primarily for incidents in which there was no suspect, no evidence, no immediate safety concerns, and where no physical harm had occurred. Participants felt that incidents in which a complainant was principally interested in obtaining a police file number for insurance purposes was an excellent use of online reporting. However, participants were concerned that there might be incidents reported using online reporting that should have had a police officer attend and that incidents that posed a real safety issue were being reported online for a variety of reasons but were resulting in too much time passing between when the incident was reported, when it was reviewed by a police officer, and when the police dispatched an officer in response to the incident. Participants also expressed the concern that, at times, the

information was reported incorrectly or some of the information was missing with the online files, which resulted in the police spending a lot of time to follow up with and conclude the report. This led some participants to the conclusion that online reporting could create more work for officers compared to having the complainant speak with a dispatcher in the first instance.

Participants reported several innovative responses to reduce the overall number of lower priority calls for service. Several officers noted that appropriate public education about when a call to 9-1-1 was necessary would be effective. Participants also reported the use of crime prevention programs intended to reduce calls for service. Participants reported that police organisations maintained community policing strategies, including giving away free bike locks, having volunteers put cards on vehicle windshields, and encouraging citizens not to leave visible items in their vehicles to prevent theft from auto. One innovative idea involved a commercial anti-theft strategy that involved an unremovable property identification sticker. Other prevention programs included bait mail for mail theft and bait bikes for bike theft. Several participants noted that their police agency had developed SOP's related to false alarms, and they perceived this as effective. Participants reported hotspot policing as being very effective with a notable reduction in all types of calls for service in those targeted geographic areas. Another strategy that participants often said they considered successful was the development of formalised liaison roles assigning specific community agencies to interact with specific police officers.

For the most part, participants felt that the various ways that police agencies commonly responded to lower priority calls for service was effective, practical, and reflected the volume and nature of calls for service combined with community expectations. It was important for the public to feel that the police were committed to their safety and took their concerns seriously, even if the nature of the call for service, from a policing perspective, was a lower priority issue. To that end, participants offered a diverse array of views regarding the potential for police organisations to develop and implement non-sworn member programs to improve efficacy in responding to lower priority calls for service. Numerous participants reported having worked with auxiliary or reserve officers during their career. Some reported positive experiences, while others expressed concerns, particularly safety related, indicating that reserve members should not be responding to calls for service or interacting with the public in situations where there was a known risk present, which could be almost any call for service. It was suggested that volunteers were best utilized in proactive community engagement roles based out of community policing programs and non-uniformed to present the absolute lowest level of risk. Vancouver's Community Constable Program was frequently noted by participants as a desirable model for non-sworn members. Participants also noted the positive aspects as a pre-employment program. It was suggested that these roles allowed those interested in policing the opportunity to receive important training and experience that contributed to a self-assessment and an organisational assessment of whether policing was the right kind of career.

The main recommendations of the report were:

- For every police agency to have enough patrol officers to respond to the volume of calls for service in their jurisdiction.

- Each police agency periodically review their SOPs to ensure that they always reflect not just the capacities and needs of the police agency, but changing and emerging crime trends, shifts in public expectations, the appearance of a particular issue or concern, and best practices.
- Changes in SOPs occur in consultation with the public and that changes to SOPs need to be communicated extremely clearly to the community, especially when the SOP shifts towards the police not attending certain types of lower priority calls for service in person anymore.
- Police leaders should encourage their officers to attend lower priority calls for service and emphasize the benefits and importance of doing so to the community and the career of the officer.
- Having an appointments-based response system is an effective approach to responding to those calls for service. In this approach, dispatch or officers at the police agency set up an appointment with the complainant with a time and location when a member or a representative of the police will address their concern and provide feedback to the caller.
- This approach can also be used to resolve issues in the first instance or to triage the call for service to increase the probability of a more appropriate response.
- Police agencies should review the nature and volume of online reporting against their SOPs to ensure that it is being used appropriately and whether modifications to the type of incidents or the nature of the incidents needs to be made.
- Police agencies should review the nature and volume of online reporting against their SOPs to ensure that it is being used appropriately and whether modifications to the type of incidents or the nature of the incidents needs to be made.
- Police agencies should evaluate how well the system is working and whether there are additional file types or incidents that could be added to the eligible list of incidents for online reporting.
- Police agencies should set up a survey that people can fill out after completing their online report to solicit user feedback on their experience and view of the online reporting system.
- Police agencies should continue to promote the online reporting system, the purpose and requirements for online reporting, and how to use online reporting.
- Whenever the opportunity exists for non-sworn, civilian employees to be assigned administrative duties, this should be considered as it reduces the burden on sworn members allowing them more time to focus on all tasks related to responding and investigating calls for service.
- Police agencies should always leverage technology to decrease the amount of time it takes to clear a lower priority call for service, such as using messaging applications, email, and mobile phones.
- Integrate bylaw officers more with police, similar to the approach taken in the cities of Surrey and Kelowna.
- Police agencies to explore the costs and benefits with establishing their own OCCs.
- Create a team of qualified, trained, and experienced police officers from several RCMP detachments and municipal police departments assigned to E-Comm to assist dispatchers and call-takers to triage challenging calls for service.



- In smaller communities or those where there was limited capacity to resource, develop, and implement special municipal constable programs, another option is the hiring of Contracted Commissionaires assigned to serve subpoenas and summons in situations where there was no public safety concern.
- Police agencies should collect and analyse data about the volume and nature of calls for service that included a mental health component. The collection and analysis of this type of data would be useful for future consideration of the role that non-sworn members could play in the reduction and response to lower priority calls for service.

## Introduction

In Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) detachments and municipal police departments across British Columbia, the largest proportion of calls for service are considered lower priority calls, commonly referred to as Priority 3 and Priority 4 calls (De Jager, 2021). For the most part, Priority 1 calls are dispatched immediately and officers travel to the scene with emergency lights and siren active. Priority 2 calls also involve a rapid response from the police, but where the immediate threat to a person's safety or property is considered limited. Priority 3 calls do not require active emergency lights and sirens, are typically viewed as less serious, and are typically responded to after all Priority 1 and 2 calls have been cleared. Priority 4 calls are those that do not require the attendance of police, but may be responded to if, or when, there is sufficient time, such as nuisance calls, abandoned vehicle, or the report of a disturbance. Importantly, a police response to a call for service, even if a lower priority call, is expensive and consumes police resources and time.

Lower priority calls for service commonly involve some forms of traffic incidents, such as speeding or erratic driving where the caller no longer has visual contact with the violating vehicle offences, minor motor vehicle incidents, thefts, public nuisance complaints, a non-violent disturbance, suspicious persons, suspicious circumstances, and non-emergency assist police/fire/ambulance. While these types of calls typically do not require an immediate police response, the ways in which the police address these calls can have a substantial effect on the public's perception of their local police, the responsiveness of the police to the community, and public satisfaction with their police, to say nothing of the level of resources that a police agency spends on these types of calls.

Given this, while it is important for police leaders to have a clear understanding of the nature and quantity of lower priority calls for service, it is also important to examine the various ways that police organisations have used to address these calls to both position police organisations to better maintain public safety and promote positive relationships and partnerships with the community, and to address lower priority calls for service effectively and efficiently for service.

The two main objectives of this project are to identify the nature and quantity of lower priority calls for service in RCMP Detachments located across the Lower Mainland of British Columbia to provide the context for the second main objective. The second purpose is to identify what is considered the most effective and efficient strategies and practices for the police to respond to the volume of lower priority calls for service. This project will examine the approaches of law enforcement agencies that have demonstrated success in addressing these types of calls effectively and have done so in ways that enhance community-police relationships, while maintaining public safety and reducing the burden on sworn members from lower priority calls for service. By providing an assessment of the various practices, methods, models, and philosophies that are currently being employed by different police agencies, this project will provide an overall assessment and recommendations designed to improve the quality and efficacy of RCMP efforts to respond to lower priority calls for service.

## Literature Review

In 2019 and in 2020, there were over 1.84 million calls for service to 9-1-1 in British Columbia, Canada. This volume of calls of service represented an increase from nearly 1.6 million calls in 2018 and almost 1.5 million calls in 2017 (E-Comm 9-1-1, 2020). Of the calls for service in 2019, 71% were police related (E-Comm 9-1-1, 2020). The 2019 annual E-Comm report showed that out of the 1.84 million calls to 9-1-1, 699,911 were for non-emergency police services (38 per cent), and 610,141 were for emergency police services (33 per cent). This volume of calls represents a 7% increase in the total number of calls for service in 2019 compared to 2018 statistics.<sup>1</sup> Of note, the South Coast British Columbia Transit Authority Police Service began to use E-Comm<sup>2</sup> in 2019, which may account for some of the increase seen in calls for service between 2018 and 2019. Recognizing police call for service trends is important for understanding the burden on British Columbian police departments (E-Comm 9-1-1, 2019).<sup>3</sup>

The upward trend in calls for service has occurred nationwide as Statistics Canada reported 13.5 million calls for service across Canada in 2018 and 2019, a 6% increase from 2017. A substantial proportion of these calls, ranging from 50% to 80%, involved responses to incidents that were non-criminal, including disturbances, alarms, or wellbeing checks (see Mazowita & Rotenberg, 2019). According to recent Statistics Canada reports, police departments across Canada responded to over 1,500 calls for service each hour (Conor et al., 2019, 2020). In the summer months during the 2020 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, several police departments showed increases in well-being checks, child custody, and domestic disputes (Statistics Canada, 2020).<sup>4</sup> With the steady increase in service calls, police have found it progressively more challenging to respond to all requests for service in a timely fashion (Larsen, 2020). Moreover, the rate of police strength has continued to decline since 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> The total number of 9-1-1 calls in 2018 was 1,588,011. Of these calls, 554,180 were for non-emergency police services (35 per cent) and 464,816 were emergency police services (29 per cent).

<sup>2</sup> E-Comm, or the Emergency Communications for British Columbia provides emergency communication services related to public safety and public service. E-Comm is responsible for, among other things, 9-1-1 call centres and dispatch operations in British Columbia. All police agencies in Metro Vancouver and Abbotsford use E-Comm. More information about E-Comm can be found at <https://www.ecomm911.ca>.

<sup>3</sup> Please see the Results section below for an overview and analysis of RCMP “E” Division Operations Strategy Branch data on calls for service by Priority levels in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

<sup>4</sup> The following 17 police departments were part of that study; Calgary Police Service, Edmonton Police Service, Halton Regional Police Service, Kennebecasis Regional Police Force, London Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), Ottawa Police Service, Regina Police Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Royal Newfoundland and Constabulary, Saskatoon Police Service, Toronto Police Service, Vancouver Police Department, Victoria Police Department, Waterloo Regional Police Service, Winnipeg Police Service, and York Regional Police (Statistics Canada 2020).

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

British Columbia has several police forces that deliver services to over 5.1 million residents in the province (Government of British Columbia, 2020). The geography of British Columbia presents unique challenges for police departments as the province is made up of large city centers, such as the City of Vancouver and the City of Surrey, as well as rural and remote communities, in addition to international and domestic ports, and international airports, such as Vancouver International Airport (YVR) and Abbotsford International Airport (YXX). Policing services in the province include the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), 11 municipal police forces,<sup>5</sup> one First Nations police department,<sup>6</sup> and several other agencies, such as the transit police, railway police, and integrated policing units (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-c).

Past research using RCMP data showed a steady increase in service calls and a decline in response times and case completion over a 30-year period in British Columbia (Malm et al., 2005). Although these trends coincide with population increases, British Columbia trails behind many other provinces in Canada regarding police officer to population ratio (Malm et al., 2005, Statistics Canada, 2019). The province of British Columbia has 190.8 fully sworn police officers per 100,000 population, which is lower than the rates in five other provinces in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2019).<sup>7</sup> Due to the influx in police service calls, response times have continued to increase significantly. Many agencies expect that, in addition response times, the proportion of calls for service that police can respond to will also decrease for police departments in British Columbia, especially for lower priority service calls (Howell, 2017). For example, in 2020, the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) announced the development and implementation of a new Neighbourhood Response Team (NRT) to serve the public on incidents of disturbances or suspicious activity (i.e., lower priority calls) to relieve the workload of general duty or patrol officers (Larsen, 2020). Other provinces have noted similar increases in their volume of calls for service. In Alberta, the Edmonton Police Department Chief emphasized that “lower priority calls for service are ‘jamming the system’” (Stillger, 2020, para. 15). These concerns have led police leaders to search for alternative approaches to prioritizing calls for service and considering and developing alternative methods to respond to lower priority calls for service. This section of the report will review the research literature and supplementary resources on how police prioritize calls for service, some of the programs and responses that police organisations have implemented to address lower priority calls for service, the role of tiered policing in responding to lower priority calls for service, and the use of non-sworn members by the police.

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<sup>5</sup> Abbotsford, Central Saanich, Delta, Nelson, New Westminster, Oak Bay, Port Moody, Saanich, Vancouver, Victoria/Esquimalt, and West Vancouver.

<sup>6</sup> The Stl'at'imx (Stat-la-mic) Tribal Police Service.

<sup>7</sup> Nova Scotia (197.6 per 100,000), Saskatchewan (209.6 per 100,000), Yukon (340.2 per 100,000), Nunavut (376.5 per 100,000), and Northwest Territories (470.7 per 100,000; Statistics Canada, 2019).

## PRIORITIZING CALLS FOR SERVICE

Due to the large volume of calls for service that police organisations receive every day, police agencies have different ways of classifying and prioritizing service calls. For the RCMP, generally, calls have four priority levels<sup>8</sup>, with priority one being the most serious. Priority 1 calls get dispatched immediately, and officers travel to the scene with emergency lights and siren active. These incidents involve a risk of serious bodily harm or death and require immediate police response/attention. For example, priority 1 calls include in-progress crimes, such as assaults, kidnappings, or armed robberies. Priority 2 calls also involve a rapid response from the police but are service calls in which the immediate threat to a person's safety or property is considered limited. These incidents are urgent but may or may not involve a risk of injury or death. Priority 2 calls include in-progress break and enters, in-progress frauds, in-progress indecent acts, 9-1-1 hang-ups, or in-progress prowlers. Priority 3 calls do not require active emergency lights and sirens, are typically viewed as less serious, and are, for the most part, responded to after police clear all priority 1 and 2 calls. These include non-emergency routine calls that require police presence, attention, and service but are not urgent (i.e., no crime in-progress). These incidents include suspicious individuals, circumstances, or vehicles and missing persons, break and enters, or sexual assaults after-the-fact. Priority 4 calls do not require police attendance (e.g., non-emergency calls) but are responded to if or when there is sufficient time and resources. These calls are used for information purposes to make a record of incidents, such as to record the incident of a theft or to report mischief (Demers et al., 2007; Griffiths & Fennig, 2008; Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RCMP], 2021). The police response times to these calls reflects the assigned priority, with Priority 1 calls generally having a target of attending the scene in less than 10 minutes (Stillger, 2020). For instance, the City of Richmond published a report on RCMP response times in Richmond based on call priority type. The average response times were as follows:

Priority 1 calls: 8 minutes, 71 seconds.

Priority 2 calls: 18 minutes, 53 seconds.

Priority 3 calls: 44 minutes, 45 seconds.

Priority 4 calls: 61 minutes, 72 seconds (City of Richmond, 2007).

The report provided a breakdown for each priority type showing two timeframes: (1) the time from the received call to the time the information was relayed to dispatch, then (2) the time from dispatch to police arriving on the scene (City of Richmond, 2007).<sup>9</sup> By contrast, publicly available

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<sup>8</sup> As will be discussed below, additional priority levels are sometimes used as “dummy” codes entered by dispatch to force a re-sort of the pending calls in the queue. For example, if there are too many calls in the queue and dispatch knows that one call needs to be responded to before another, but they both have a default of priority 2, they may recode one of the calls to a Priority 5 or 6.

<sup>9</sup> Rates reported in-text include a composite time: the sum of time from call received-to-dispatch plus time from dispatch-to-police on the scene. A breakdown is presented here: Priority 1 calls received-to-dispatch time = 0:02:56 and dispatch-to-scene time = 0:06:15; Priority 2 calls received-to-dispatch time = 0:09:20 and dispatch-to-scene time = 0:09:33; Priority 3: calls received-to-dispatch time = 0:29:31 and dispatch-to-scene time = 0:15:14; Priority 4 calls received-to-dispatch time = 0:42:56 and dispatch-to-scene time = 0:19:16 (City of Richmond, 2007, see p. 52).

information posted on the VPD's social media accounts (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) suggested a marginally different prioritization of police calls for service than the RCMP. Call prioritizations for VPD are in three main categorizations. Priority 1 calls require an immediate police response and can include, for example, an individual with a gun or in-progress crimes, such as sexual assault, assault, or robbery. Priority 2 calls necessitate an urgent police response. For instance, this includes the in-progress incidents of break and enter, a prowler in the neighbourhood, theft, or fraud. Priority 3 calls require a non-urgent response. These are crimes that are not in progress, such as reporting a theft, break and enter after-the-fact, or calls that do not require a response from an officer (Vancouver Police Department [VPD], 2020a).

VPD response times to Priority 1 calls received between 2011 and 2020 up to and including Quarter 3 (i.e., January to September months) have gradually increased from 8 minutes, 16 seconds in 2011 to 10 minutes, 34 seconds in 2019 (Manojlovic, 2020). Response times in 2020 showed a 3.2% decrease (10 minutes, 14 seconds), although it was suggested that this improvement was probably due to causes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, such as a reduction in commuting and traffic, among other changes, that freed up patrol officers' time (see Manojlovic, 2020). Moreover, Manojlovic (2020) reported a reduction in calls for service in 2019 overall; in total, 13.5% fewer calls for service in 2020 compared to 2019, although there was an increase of 1.5% in Priority 1 calls in 2020. Some other changes included court closures and training cancellations, as well as more officers (about 12% more) being on the road.

The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) uses a seven-tiered classification system for prioritizing calls for service with slightly different incident types within categories. Priority 1 calls include "imminent danger to life". Priority 2 calls "require rapid police response where there is a potential for serious bodily harm". For example, weapons are onsite, or victims are injured. Priority 3 calls are incidents or crimes that "there is a reasonable belief that an extended delay in response may place persons, property, or evidence at risk". Priority 4 calls are incidents or crimes that are not in progress (i.e., non-emergency), although there is important evidence to collect from the scene (e.g., physical or digital evidence and/or witness statements) that require on-scene services from the police. Priority 5 calls are listed as being "used for radio broadcast". Priority 6 calls are incidents or crimes that are not in progress (i.e., non-emergency), there is no police evidence to log or gather (i.e., no witnesses or physical evidence available), and there is no injury, potential for injury, or severe emotional trauma to the victim. Moreover, suspects are either unknown or are unlikely to be apprehended by police. Priority 7 calls are for recovered "property pickup" (Ottawa Police Service [OPS], 2014, p. 12).

OPS had over 709,000 calls for police service in 2019; a 3% increase from the prior year. Nearly 346,000 calls were recorded in the computer-aided dispatch system (CAD), and roughly 246,000 (71 per cent) of these CAD reports necessitated on-scene police services. Roughly 4,300 OPS CAD records in 2019 were classified as Priority 1 or emergency calls for police services, an increase of 5% from 2018 Priority 1 call volumes (OPS, 2020). Generally, the OPS emphasizes Priority 1 call response times, which have remained consistent over several years, at roughly 15 minutes to arrive on scene (OPS, 2020). The OPS has reported a service time metric reflecting the total number of officer hours used to handle service calls throughout the year broken down by priority level. For instance, "in 2019, service time increased by 7 percent to 299,800 hours" of police work dedicated

to service calls (OPS, 2020, para. 3). As an example, Table 1 compares OPS 2017, 2018, and 2019 number of calls for service by priority levels categories. Interestingly, the proportion of Priority 6 calls decreased from 18% of the total calls in 2017 to 10% in 2019. Of note, this category of calls for service is like Priority 3 and 4 calls for service for the RCMP.

**TABLE 1: NUMBER OF 2017, 2018, AND 2019 OPS SERVICE CALLS FOR ALL PRIORITY LEVELS**

Call Priority	2017	2018	2019
1	3,944	4,114	4,313
2	30,399	31,991	33,689
3	44,865	48,463	51,659
4	172,178	194,447	211,030
5	3,408	6,133	5,536
6	56,737	35,894	37,455
7	1,028	1,852	2,066
<b>Total<sub>a</sub></b>	<b>312,559</b>	<b>322,894</b>	<b>345,748</b>

*Note.* subscripts denote total calls entered in the computer-aided dispatch system. Rates noted for 2017 were sourced from the annual 2017 OPS report (OPS, 2017). Rates from 2018 and 2019 were sourced from City of Ottawa (2020) *2018-2019 Crime Trends* report.

The Toronto Police Service (TPS) highlighted service call statistics under indicators of service excellence. The seven measures include: (1) total calls received for police service; (2) events attended by police; (3) crimes against persons; (4) crimes against property; (5) traffic collisions; (6) traffic fatalities; and (7) “persons in crisis” calls attended. TPS year-to-date Q3 (January to September) statistics for 2019 showed that the TPS received over 1.4 million calls for police service, nearly 513,000 of which were attended by police (Toronto Police Service [TPS], 2021a). IN the past, the TPS had a Primary Response Team that responded to every type of call for police service “from high priority calls, such as shootings, to non-emergencies, such as minor by-law issues” and “once on-site, officers are responsible for resolving the call in its entirety – from controlling immediate safety concerns to evidence collection and report submission” (TPS, 2017, p. 26). It was viewed that this response model could impede officers’ availability to respond to other service calls. Given this, the TPS established the Investigative Support Unit to respond to lower priority calls for service. In addition, the TPS website outlines a guide for whom to call in different situations. For example, TPS recommends 3-1-1 for noise complaints or graffiti, 9-1-1 for emergencies where there is a risk of death (e.g., heart attacks, assaults in-progress), and the TPS non-emergency line or online reporting for theft under \$5000 or fraud under \$5000 (TPS, n.d.).

In a final report by TPS, *Action Plan: The Way Forward, Modernizing Community Safety in Toronto* (2017), the Transformational Task Force recommended implementing a two-component response for police calls for service. First, the Priority Response Team provides on-scene safety to community members in emergencies. Second, the Investigative Support Unit handles service calls when persons or property are not at risk. In certain circumstances, TPS may implement both strategies. In these cases, the Priority Response team takes care of safety concerns, and the Investigative Support Unit carries out the initial investigative activities that allows the Priority

Response Team to redeploy to other emergency calls (TPS, 2017). Essentially, the Investigative Support Unit offers preliminary investigative services until the appropriate investigation unit is made available. The following situation provides an example, “Someone arrives home at night to find that their front door is ajar and that their home has been broken into. They don’t know whether it’s safe to enter and they call the TPS. Priority officers will be dispatched to make sure that the situation is safe. Once that is done, the [Investigative Support Unit ] will attend to collect evidence and take the report, which frees up the Priority units to respond to other priority calls” (TPS, 2017, p. 26).

Alternatively, the Edmonton Police Service outlined their calls for service as priorities ranging from zero to nine, with priority zero being an officer in distress, one being an active threat, two being an in-progress risk to property, three being a situation in which an offence just occurred and there is a good likelihood of locating a suspect, while four is the nature of the incident being time sensitive. For example, this might include a call where a shoplifter has been apprehended by security and is being cooperative. Priority 5 calls are general service calls that are not time sensitive, Priority 6 is an occurrence that is considered minor, such as a bylaw violation, Priority 7 is a hold event for a general occurrence call in which dispatch and the caller have the time to resume the call, and Priority 9 is used to broadcast information (Edmonton Police Service, 2018).

Regardless of variations in the number of priorities that different police agencies may use, police consider high priority calls for service to be those that present imminent threat to life or those calls that allow the police to prevent the continuation of an offence, such as an assault in progress or a weapon related call. The next tier of priority calls is those that require police attention as soon as possible and practical in an effort to collect any evidence. Lower priority calls for service tend to be those related to lost property, automatic burglar alarms, reports of fraud, nuisance calls, and property crimes where the incident occurred in the past, known as late reporting. Of note, regardless of the specific underlying classification system used by a police agency, the majority of calls for service appear to be lower priority or non-emergency calls.

## **PROGRAMS AND RESPONSES TO LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

### **FALSE ALARMS: CITY PERMITS, FINES, AND VERIFIED RESPONSE**

In the early-to-mid 90s, many municipalities in British Columbia, such as the City of Vancouver and the City of Richmond, recognized increasing rates of false alarms attended by police officers (e.g., Johnston, 2000; City of Richmond, 2003). For example, in 1992, the VPD responded to 40,000 false alarms, which made up 18% of officers’ time and represented a lower priority call for service (City of Vancouver, 2013). In Richmond, approximately 20% to 25% of false alarms were due to equipment issues/failures, such as a battery failure (Richmond, 2003). As a result of these types of issues, the False Alarm Reduction Program was enacted in the City of Vancouver to reduce the time allocated to responding to false alarms. This program bridged the VPD with professionals from the security/alarm industry to create a co-operative approach to address high false alarm rates (City of Richmond, 2003). The False Alarm Reduction Program supported the use of permits and fines over a strictly fining approach. Therefore, in 1993, the City of Vancouver implemented Bylaw No. 7111,



requiring individuals with homes and businesses with security alarm systems installed to have a valid permit (City of Vancouver, 2013; City of Richmond, 2003).

In Vancouver, in 2020, annual alarm registration fees were \$18 for residential dwellings, \$30 for small businesses, and \$60 for large businesses. If three or more false alarms occur at a business or residence during a single year, the alarm permit is suspended. Reinstatement fees for alarm permits are \$75 for residential dwellings, \$125 for small businesses, and \$250 for large businesses after the first cancellation (VPD, n.d.-b). In the event that a second cancellation occurs, reinstatement fees increase to \$150 for residential dwellings, \$250 for small businesses, and \$500 for large businesses (City of Vancouver, 2013). Any violation of the City of Vancouver's Bylaw No. 7111 may also include fines "not less than \$250 and not more than \$10,000 for each offence" and continuing offences, an individual is "liable to a fine, not less than \$1,000 and not more than \$10,000 for each day such offence continues" (City of Vancouver, 2013, p. 8). A similar approach has been implemented in the City of Richmond. A false alarm reduction program is in place, and owners are liable for fines associated with false alarms. For example, if a police officer or bylaw officer responds to a false security alarm, the fine is \$125 (see section 15.5.10 in Bylaw No. 8636, City of Richmond, 2011). To date, there are many municipalities that have implemented a similar approach to reduce the burden on police to respond to false alarms.

Comparable problems have occurred in many jurisdictions in the United States. According to Blackstone et al. (2020), security alarms contribute to a large strain on police departments and account for 10% to 20% of calls for service to the police (Blackstone et al., 2020). Moreover, each of these calls consumes approximately 11 minutes of a 9-1-1 dispatcher's time and costs police departments nearly \$100 US per call (Blackstone et al., 2020). Further, over 90% of the security alarm activations are false alarms (Blackstone et al., 2020). While there is some research suggesting that efforts to reduce these false activations, such as charging fines and educating repeat false activators, have not been successful (Blackstone et al., 2020), many police organisations continue to use this approach.

Alternatively, several police departments in western cities in Canada and the United States have implemented a different approach known as Verified Response (VR) or Enhanced Call Verification (see Blackstone et al., 2020; Sidhu, 2017). VR requires either physical or visual verification by complainants, other individuals, or private response companies to notify the police of an attempted or actual break and enter before dispatching police. In a study by Blackstone et al. (2020), researchers selected eight out of 33 North American cities<sup>10</sup> that adopted Verified Response (VR) and assessed the effectiveness of VR to reduce false alarm calls for police service. Blackstone et al. (2020) concluded that requiring VR had the capacity to reduce police responses to false alarms by over 85% per year, which would contribute to a more effective and efficient distribution of police resources.

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<sup>10</sup> Blackstone et al. (2020) acknowledged that there were a total of 33 North American cities with VR in western United States and Canada. Their analyses focused on data from Salt Lake City, UT, Aurora, Breckenridge, Broomfield, and Lakewood, CO, Burien, WA, Milwaukee, WI, and Dallas, TX. Some Canadian cities using VR include Coquitlam, Chilliwack, Delta, Langley, and Mission (see Aun, 2012; Sidhu, 2017).

### 3-1-1 SERVICES

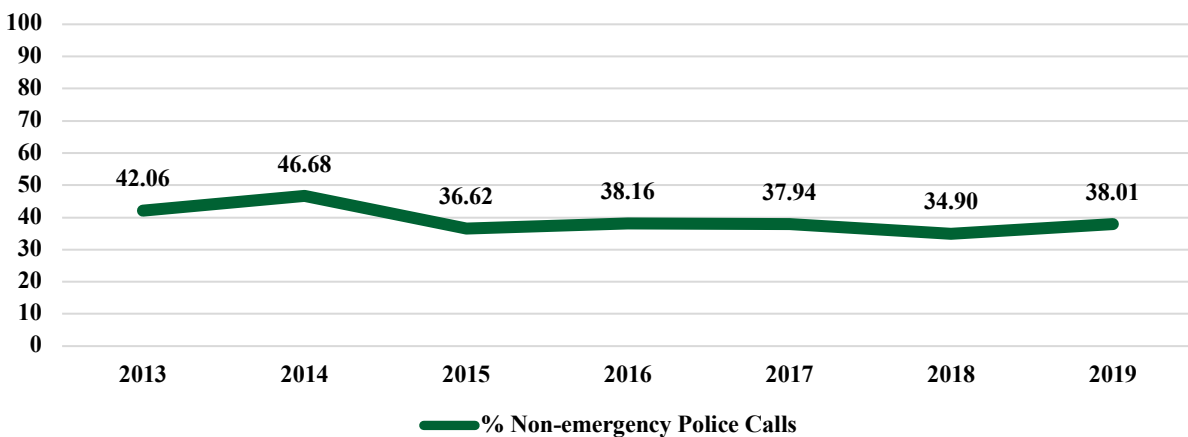
The first point of contact for the public requiring police assistance is typically the 9-1-1 call centre or local non-emergency lines. Wilson and Weiss (2014) noted the importance of implementing non-emergency lines or introducing 3-1-1 as a number for non-emergency calls (Wilson & Weiss, 2014). In effect, 3-1-1 is used for non-emergency municipal government services, such as noise complaints, broken streetlights, or other city services (CBC News, 2018). Like 9-1-1, 3-1-1 is short and easy to remember and creates a single-point-of-access for residents to request city services and information. Many American cities started using 3-1-1 in 1997 (e.g., New York, Los Angeles; City of Vancouver, 2006), although Baltimore, Maryland, was the first city in the United States to adopt the program in 1996 (City of Baltimore, 2018). According to Wilson and Weiss (2014), during the first year that the Baltimore Police Department adopted the 3-1-1 system, they reduced their 9-1-1 calls by 25% by eliminating the lowest priority calls for service from the emergency lines. Researchers also conducted an in-depth evaluation of the implementation of 3-1-1 on reducing 9-1-1 calls for police service in the city of Baltimore. Results showed a 34% decrease in 9-1-1 calls over a two-year period (1996-1998) and community satisfaction with the non-emergency service (Mazerolle et al., 2003). Most (70% to 80%) citizens indicated that the 3-1-1 system strengthened city-community and police-community communication and service (Gonzales et al., 2005). Compared to pre-implementation call volumes, non-emergency services (e.g., 3-1-1) reduced Priority 5 calls for service (e.g., noise complaints, parking violations, or potholes) made to 9-1-1 by 99% and by 54% to both 3-1-1 and 9-1-1 jointly. It is important to note that the results were confounded by the Baltimore Police Department's decision to cease officer dispatch for lower priority calls that might have discouraged citizens from calling for services in the first place (Gonzales et al., 2001; Mazerolle et al., 2003). Despite these effects, the research findings indicated that Priority 1 response times increased after 3-1-1 implementation and Baltimore police continued to dispatch for other lower priority calls (excluding Priority 5) 3-1-1 and 9-1-1 calls for service. Houston, Texas experienced a 14% decrease and Austin, Texas reported a 37% decrease in non-emergency 9-1-1 calls within one year (2001-2002). In 2003, Rochester, New York reported approximately 40% of all crime reports were addressed through 3-1-1 service providers (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). The 3-1-1 system can also be utilized during large weather incidents, such as ice storm or power outages, to help reduce demands on the 9-1-1 systems (e.g., U.S. Department of Justice, 2007; Wilson & Weiss, 2014).

In part due to the success of 3-1-1 in the United States, in 2004, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) granted permission for 3-1-1 use in Canada. As a result, many Canadian cities started to offer 3-1-1 services to residents. Calgary was the first city in Canada to offer 3-1-1 services in 2006 (Gilligan, 2015). During Calgary's 2013 mass flood in June and July, the 3-1-1 communication centre dealt with over 330,000 calls for service, which was double the normal amount during this time of year (Gilligan, 2015). The City of Vancouver recommended the launch of 3-1-1 services in British Columbia in 2006, and the implementation phase of the 3-1-1 program began in Vancouver in 2007 (City of Vancouver, 2006). The City stated that the primary goal of the 3-1-1 program in Vancouver was to give people timely and accessible access to important city services; while 3-1-1 implementation may reduce the number of non-emergency calls to 9-1-1, this was identified as an added benefit and not a key motivator in implementing 3-1-1

in Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2006). This may explain why no evaluation information is available on the effect of 3-1-1 implementation in Vancouver on 9-1-1 call volumes. Still, news reports suggest that 3-1-1 services handle a growing number of calls for services. For example, in 2018, the manager of the City of Vancouver’s 3-1-1 contact centre, Richard Traer, told CBC News that, in 2015, 3-1-1 handled 1.5 million calls at the center, which was a substantial increase from the 200,000 calls made during their first year in service (CBC News, 2019). On busier days, 3-1-1 in Vancouver can respond to 4,000 calls daily dealing with complaints or requesting city services. The call centre is open 7 days a week from 7 am to 10 pm, 365 days per year (CBC News, 2018). In contrast, in Toronto, 3-1-1 services operate 24/7 and partner with local police services to reduce the number of noise complaints and non-emergency calls made to 9-1-1 (Yorke, 2019).

Emergency Communications (i.e., ‘E-Comm’), the 9-1-1 service provider for British Columbia, publishes an annual report on total calls received and the number of non-emergency calls, distinguishing non-emergency rates for police and fire services.<sup>11</sup> Figure 1 presents the proportion of non-emergency police calls made to 9-1-1 over the past seven years. Unfortunately, the annual reports in the years before 2013 inconsistently reported non-emergency call rates. As well, E-Comm does not separate calls by municipality. Given these limitations, changes in non-emergency calls for police service cannot be directly attributed to 3-1-1 program implementation in certain British Columbian regions (e.g., the 2007 3-1-1 implementation in the City of Vancouver). Still, the graph does show a drop from 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 in the proportion of non-emergency police calls made to 9-1-1 in the province; the proportion of non-emergency calls made to 9-1-1 has generally remained stable since 2015/2016.

**FIGURE 1: THE PROPORTION OF NON-EMERGENCY RELATED POLICE CALLS TO 9-1-1 IN BRITISH COLUMBIA FROM 2013 TO 2019**



<sup>11</sup> E-Comm provides 9-1-1 services – police, fire, and ambulance – for 25 regional districts in British Columbia (99% of British Columbia’s call volume) in Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley (see <https://www.ecomm911.ca/about-e-comm/>).

While the reduction in non-emergency calls to 9-1-1 cannot be directly attributed to the introduction of the 3-1-1 system, one suggestion is that the decrease in non-emergency calls to 9-1-1 was credited to E-Comm's public non-emergency education/awareness campaigns. E-Comm's "efforts received top honours from one of Canada's premiere print and online publications, Applied Arts Magazine, for a public safety video that formed part of a non-emergency campaign. Titled *Brother/Bicycle*, the video dramatically illustrates the overarching message of the campaign – "Don't let non-emergencies compete with real ones" – through visual overlays between an emergent and non-emergent situation" (E-Comm 9-1-1, 2015, p. 12). Similar educational campaigns have been used over the years. Overall, then, the availability of non-emergency lines/services (e.g., 3-1-1) and educational efforts appear to have had some degree of positive effect on the proportion of non-emergency calls overburdening 9-1-1 call centres and, in turn, local police departments.

Non-emergency 3-1-1 services in many cities across Canada offer several ways residents can submit inquiries, complaints, or requests for services, including by phone, email, online submission form, or mobile application (Lu & Johnson, 2016). This offers an alternative service for lower priority calls rather than citizens contacting emergency call centres with non-emergency related issues. In a Canadian case study, Lu and Johnson (2016) analyzed requests for 3-1-1 service data in the city of Edmonton to understand the use of different submission channels over a three-year period. They examined geographic hotspots and various sociodemographic information by request channel type (telephone, website form, email, and mobile app called "Edmonton 3-1-1"). The results indicated that, over three years, 10% to 20% of all 3-1-1 service requests were made on the mobile application. Although phone requests were still the most popular method, researchers noted a transition from traditional forms of communication to internet-based forms of communication, which accounted for 20% to 35% of the total request types in the last year of the study (Lu & Johnson, 2016). Regarding sociodemographic variables, older individuals made 3-1-1 requests via phone more frequently than younger individuals, and individuals with higher education levels were more likely to use internet-based forms of communication (Lu & Johnson, 2016).

### **ONLINE REPORTING SERVICES**

Another way to reduce the volume and strain that lower priority calls for service put on police organisations is by allowing citizens to report less serious crimes through online reporting services. This strategy can be very useful for crimes that may not require police attendance or follow up, such as lost property, traffic accidents, or incidents with little likelihood of successful collection of relevant evidence or of being solved (Howell, 2017; Wilson & Weiss, 2014). Implementing online reporting has been shown to reduce the requirement for police attendance at lower priority calls for service by allowing more emergent calls to be made through 9-1-1 and giving officers more opportunity to focus on higher priority calls for service (Wilson & Weiss, 2014). Nevertheless, online reporting still allows citizens' concerns to be heard and dealt with in a timely manner, as well as providing them with a file number for insurance purposes where required (Wilson & Weiss, 2014). Moreover, creating accident reporting centres can eliminate the need for police officers to attend minor vehicle accident calls for service that can serve to reduce patrol workloads by no longer needing to write reports where there are no injuries (Wilson & Weiss, 2014). Some police

agencies have concluded that not attending particular lower priority calls for service is necessary to enhance response times for more serious calls.

In British Columbia, minor crimes (i.e., non-emergency related) can be reported online to police departments in various municipalities, including the RCMP in Kamloops, Kelowna, Mission, Nanaimo, Prince George, Richmond, Ridge Meadows, and Surrey, as well as the VPD and Victoria Police Department (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-a). At the time of writing this report, the RCMP online crime reporting system accepts online submissions for damage or mischief under \$5000 to property or vehicle, theft under \$5000, theft of a bicycle under \$5000, theft from a motor vehicle under \$5000, and lost property. Depending on the local RCMP detachment, some detachments also accept online submissions for hit and run offences, an unoccupied vehicle or property, driving complaints, and lost/stolen license plates or insurance decals (RCMP, n.d.). The RCMP reporting system has a brief survey that an individual fills out to determine whether the incident falls under the types of crime approved for online submissions (see Figure 2). Initially, an individual will select the type of incident that occurred from the following list:

- Something was damaged or vandalized.
- Something was stolen.
- Something was lost.
- Someone was driving poorly (RCMP, n.d.).

When one of these options is selected, the individual will receive several additional questions to ascertain whether the incident falls into the online crime type criteria (see the example below). If “something was stolen” but not an item taken from a vehicle or a bike, a series of follow-up questions are asked; if an individual responds “yes” to any of the 5 follow-up questions, the incident cannot be submitted online (RCMP, n.d.).

**FIGURE 2: RCMP ONLINE CRIME REPORTING SYSTEM: INTAKE SURVEY**

Other police departments, such as the VPD, allow online reports for lost or stolen property under \$10,000 and for non-violent incidents or bank cards or cheques used without the owner's permission under \$10,000 (VPD, n.d.-c). The VPD has eight steps to their online crime reporting system:

1. *Start*: verify/confirm that the online crime submission is appropriate for the situation.
2. *Incident*: determine when and where the crime took place.
3. *Who*: enter personal/contact information.
4. *Details*: provide additional information related to the crime, e.g., the value of the property stolen, or a serial number on a bicycle.
5. *Summary*: describe the incident.
6. *Contact*: if police require more information, indicate who they should contact.
7. *Review*: check all the report information prior to submitting the incident form.
8. *Finish*: submit completed report (VPD, n.d.-c).

Advancements in communication technologies have been essential in how residents access other government services. Van de Water (2010) investigated the success of online crime reporting for lower priority calls for service at 16 police departments located in the United States and Canada. Surveys were administered to departments to examine the types of crime incidents accepted through online reporting, the procedures in reviewing/processing online reports, and the costs/benefits to the agency. Van de Water found that all participating agencies accepted online crime reports for lost property, vandalism, and theft of property, although the amount varied.<sup>12</sup> For example, some police agencies placed the limit at \$5,000, while others placed the limit at \$10,000. Most accepted auto burglary, identity theft, and harassment reports (80 per cent to 90 per cent). However, only 40% of agencies accepted automobile accidents, and a smaller proportion of agencies accepted residential or business burglary (10 per cent). There were several differences between the departments regarding who was responsible for reviewing online crime reports. Some allocated this responsibility to sworn officers only, civilian staff only, or a combination of the two, while others distributed the online crime reports to the appropriate unit for follow-up (Van de Water, 2010). All reports were reviewed within a 24-hour window (11.1 per cent in one hour; 33.3 per cent in eight hours and 55.6 per cent in 24 hours) and 62.5% of agencies indicated an increase in reports since the implementation of the online reporting system. On average, agencies estimated over \$350,000 in savings within the year revealing a financial benefit in offering online reporting platforms (Van de Water, 2010). According to Cartwright, "aside from the obvious savings in time and resources, there are some other benefits that are likely to be noticed after launching. Alternative service units will have a reduced backlog of reports and call-backs. Patrol units will be able to address crime trends proactively instead of writing reports for crimes that have no suspects or evidence" (2008, p. 60).

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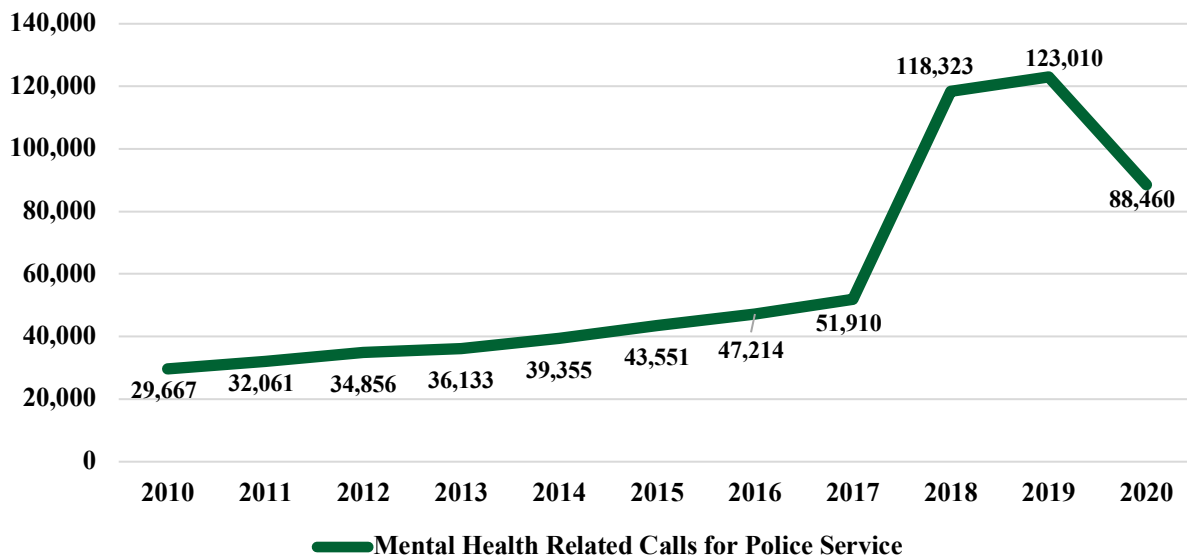
<sup>12</sup> 10 out of the 16 police agencies completed surveys.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND/OR SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES: POLICE RESPONSES

Every day, police officers face new challenges and a wide variety of calls for service, a growing proportion of which are related to mental health and/or substance use issues or incidents (Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA], 2005b; De Jager, 2021). According to publicly available occurrence data, the RCMP saw an increase in mental health-related calls for service from nearly 30,000 mental health-related calls for service in 2010 to over 123,000 in 2019. So far, in 2020, from January to August, over 88,000 mental health calls for service were made to police in Canada (RCMP, 2020a).

British Columbia ranks highest in mental health-related calls for service compared to all other provinces in Canada (RCMP, 2020a). In 2019, there were over 65,000 calls for police service related to mental health in British Columbia alone. Figure 3 presents national occurrence trends, while the provincial occurrence trends of the top three ranked provinces can be found in Figure 4 (RCMP, 2020a).<sup>13</sup>

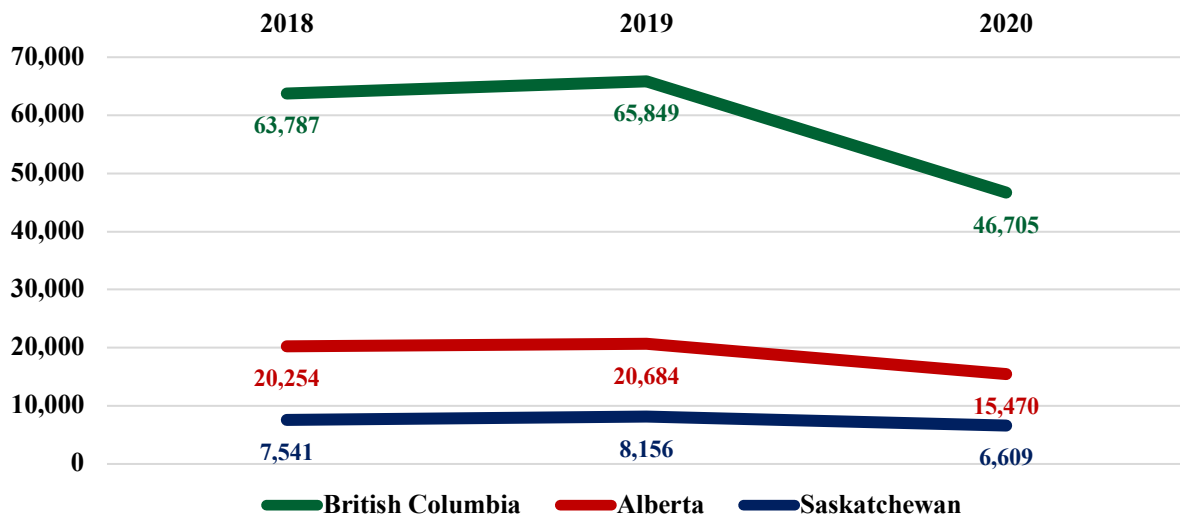
**FIGURE 3: TOTAL NUMBER OF MENTAL HEALTH RELATED CALLS FOR POLICE SERVICE IN CANADA FROM 2010 TO 2020**



*Note.* Data for 2020 inclusive of occurrences from January 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 (RCMP, 2020a).

<sup>13</sup> British Columbia data was not available from 2010 to 2017 (RCMP, 2020a).

**FIGURE 4: TOTAL NUMBER OF MENTAL HEALTH RELATED CALLS FOR POLICE SERVICE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, ALBERTA, AND SASKATCHEWAN FROM 2018 TO 2020**



*Note.* Data for 2020 inclusive of occurrences from January 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 (RCMP, 2020a).

Most mental health-related calls for police services are not associated with criminal activity, but rather crisis management (The Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, 2014). Changes in policy and institutional structures, such as deinstitutionalization, which involved a shift from institutional-based care to community-based care, created an influx of individuals with mental health needs into the community (CMHA, 2003). For instance, in British Columbia, Riverview Hospital started to transfer patients back into the community in the early 1990s (Boschma, 2011; Teghtsoonian, 2009). While some patients benefited from reintegration and independence, other patients did not and were inadequately supported for their level of need (Boschma, 2011; Teghtsoonian, 2009; Wilson-Bates, 2008).

The government was unsuccessful in re-allocating funds to community-based services, and, without sufficient care, many mental health patients struggled with securing employment and housing (CMHA, 2005a). Given the limited community resources and increasing wait times for service (Shen & Snowden, 2014), many psychiatric patients ended up poor and homeless (CMHA, 2005a), and at a greater risk for substance abuse, incarceration, and suicide (see Read, 2009). A study conducted by The Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division showed that over 30% of patients reported a history of interactions with police officers (see CMHA, 2003). Similarly, Wilson-Bates' (2008) examination of the Vancouver Police Department's calls for service over 160 days in 2007 revealed that approximately one-third (31 per cent) involved persons with a mental health issue. This proportion rose to approximately half of all calls for service in certain areas of the city.

With individuals with mental health needs left untreated, police officers are often "the first point of access to mental health services for persons with mental illness, earning them the nickname 'psychiatrists in blue'" (CMHA, 2005b, p. 1). Furthermore, police have expressed that the increase in



police-patient interactions has placed an exorbitant amount of stress on law enforcement agencies' resources. For example, Charette et al. (2014) studied police interactions with persons with mental illness in Montreal, Québec and found that calls for service involving a person with a mental illness utilized 87% more police resources than non-mental health calls. On average, police spent 89 minutes managing calls involving persons with mental illness compared to 40 minutes on non-mental health calls. The increased tendency to rely on police as the first point of contact for persons with mental illness, paired with a lack of community mental health recourses, has resulted in a "revolving door phenomenon" (Livingston, 2016; Markowitz, 2010; Mclean & Marshall, 2010; Michalski, 2017; Shore & Lavoie, 2018).

British Columbia has implemented several mental health and substance use integrated response teams to help police handle the increase in mental health-related calls for service. Local interdisciplinary teams include (1) Integrated Mobile Crisis Response Services, (2) Integrated Case Management and Outreach Services, and (3) Mental Health and Substance Use Liaison Officers (Government of British Columbia, 2018). The integrated mobile crisis response services combine a police officer and mental health nurse to assist individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, such as the VPD's Car 87/88. Like Car 87/88, the Assertive Outreach Team (AOT) is a partnership with the VPD and Vancouver Coastal Health to provide outreach services for adults that require complete and intensive short-term supervision and support services (Government of British Columbia, 2018). For example, shortly after being released from a psychiatric ward, AOT would "go out and make sure the person is on their medication and their needs are being met, and their services are wrapped around them before they do something tragic or terrible to themselves or to others" (Baker, 2014, para. 9). AOT is proactive and mitigates potential risks by offering services during a vulnerable time for individuals who present moderate-to-high risk (Government of British Columbia, 2018). Recently, the Surrey RCMP introduced a new and expanded Police Mental Health Outreach Team that responds to police occurrences involving individuals with mental health or substance use problems. The unit is a collaborative team that combines services from various agencies and units, such as Fraser Health, Car 67, a Police Mental Health Liaison, Police Mental Health Invention Unit, the Surrey Outreach Team, and an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team Constable (RCMP, 2019b).

All police officers on these integrated teams have basic mandatory crisis intervention, and some agencies require additional training, such as negotiation training for the VPD (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-c). The RCMP has an Incident Management Intervention Model (IMIM) framework that officers use in evaluating situational, individual, and tactical risk factors to apply appropriate, justifiable, and reasonable intervention responses. The RCMP requires annual recertification in the IMIM for all officers. Beginning in 2021, the IMIM will include crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques to help in risk assessment and decision-making (RCMP, 2020d).

In 2018, Parker et al. (2018) published a systematic review of 125 studies of interagency collaboration models between police and other agencies, such as community-based mental health services. The studies included in the review included service evaluations (14.4 per cent), descriptive studies (28 per cent), or mixed designed studies (18.4 per cent). The studies examined a

variety of interagency collaboration models operating in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Ireland, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and the United States:

1. *Prearrest diversion models* were mentioned in studies from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and United States. For example, the United States-based Crisis Intervention Team model involves a collaboration of services from police, emergency services, and mental health agencies (e.g., clinicians).
2. *Co-response models* were referenced in studies from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In this model, a police officer and mental health professional work together and respond to mental health-related calls for service. The objective is to prevent over-hospitalization or apprehension of individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. For instance, when needed, the “Street Triage” in the United Kingdom supports first responders during a mental health crisis.
3. *Post-booking jail diversion models* were cited in studies from the United Kingdom and the United States. Post-booking jail diversion involves a “multiagency liaison scheme” that delivers timely mental health screening and assessment of individuals that have been arrested. Service providers offer a referral/diversion to mental health-related services in the community. The Diversion at the Point of Arrest model in the United Kingdom has a psychiatric nurse that assesses jail detainees’ mental health and, if applicable, arranges community mental health services.
4. *Information sharing agreement models* were assessed in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This model promotes communication and file-sharing between different agencies in cases that involved an individual with mental health concerns. For example, the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements allow sharing of file information of sexual or violent offenders between law enforcement agencies and mental health agencies.
5. *Court diversion models* were reported in studies from Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States. This model aims to divert offenders from the criminal justice system to provide mental health services in the community.
6. *Co-location models* were reported in studies from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. A mental health practitioner works within a police department to give consultations to officers in the field.
7. *Comprehensive systems models* were mentioned in three studies from the United States. These models involve a multifaceted approach to prevent school arrests through mental health, substance use, or other prosocial programs.
8. *Consultation models* were referenced in three studies from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Officers obtain information and advice from mental health professionals when needed for a particular file. For instance, the Oldham Phone Triage provides officers around the clock mental health consultations for cases involving individuals with mental health-related issues.
9. *Joint investigation training models* were mentioned in two studies in the United Kingdom. In this model, various community service providers (e.g., police or social workers) are trained to conduct investigations with vulnerable adult victims (e.g., mental illnesses or cognitive disabilities).

10. *Re-entry programmes* were mentioned in two studies in the United States that focused on community re-integration services for individuals with mental illnesses, such as the Prime Time Project.
11. *An Integrated model* was examined in one Australian study. For example, police play an active role in programs such as the Early Psychosis Programme (Parker et al., 2018).

Overall, there is a paucity of “robust” or “high-quality evidence” on the effectiveness of interagency collaborations in police agencies (Parker et al., 2018) and the effect of these approaches on lower priority calls for service volumes.

Although interagency collaboration provides one avenue to address mental health-related calls for service, officer education/training is another important component. For example, in a recent study, Shore and Lavoie (2019) used Canadian police data to investigate the sociodemographic and situational factors associated with 400 mental health-related calls for police service (Shore & Lavoie, 2019). In these cases, individuals in a mental health crisis were seven times more likely to be apprehended under the *Mental Health Act* (MHA) if they showed signs of self-harm. They were approximately three to four times more likely to be apprehended under the MHA when a friend, relative, civilian, or service provider called police for assistance rather than the individual calling for themselves. However, those with evidence of self-harm were six to seven times more likely to be referred to community mental health services than those without these indicators. Of note, police were less likely to make a community mental health service referral for an individual in a mental health crisis when they were younger in age, an ethnic minority, or if they called for police assistance themselves. Researchers suggested that “there is a need to reduce apprehensions of PMI [people with mental illness] who are assessed as ineligible for involuntary admission to hospital” (Shore & Lavoie, 2019, p. 167). Evidence in this study suggested “that officers are over apprehending PMI under the MHA, which is problematic since these apprehensions are stigmatizing and traumatic for PMI, unnecessarily tax costly police and emergency resources, and often do not lead to mental health treatment” (Shore & Lavoie, 2019, p. 167). In sum, the results showed that police officer mental health education must include a component on the intersection between mental illness and other sociodemographic factors, especially for individuals in a mental health crisis who are younger, of ethnic minority descent, or show signs of self-harm (Shore & Lavoie, 2019). Thus, these individual-level factors combined with other crisis intervention or de-escalation techniques for low-priority mental health calls for police service are important for apprehension decision-making. Police who respond to mental health-related incidents need to consider the best possible outcome for the individual and mitigate future issues associated with police apprehension – e.g., stigmatization or excess departmental resources/costs (RCMP, 2020d; Shore & Lavoie, 2019). Indeed, Crisis Intervention Team Training produced positive “street-level” changes when responding to individuals in mental health-related crisis (Hassell, 2020). Specifically, CIT Training enhanced officers’ understanding of mental illness, intervention preparedness strategies, and perceived level of danger assigned to individuals experiencing a mental health-related crisis. Officers with this training had more incidents ending in voluntary treatment rather than involuntary treatment or apprehension (Hassell, 2020).

From the perspective of individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, Jones and Thomas’ (2019) pilot survey study implemented in New South Wales, Australia revealed that, during an encounter

with police, several components predicted how individuals responded during the incident. A total of 26 individuals affiliated with the New South Wales Consumer Advisory Group (i.e., non-governmental mental health advocacy group) participated in the pilot study. Participants all reported past police contact and answered a series of online survey measures assessing their overall rating of the police contact experience (e.g., positive, negative, etc.), perceived procedural justice, level of cooperation with police, internalized mental health stigma, and self-esteem. Consistent with results embedded in the procedural justice literature, participants who perceived procedural justice, such as fair treatment, trust, respect, and reciprocal dialogue, cooperated with police and perceived more positively the police-citizen encounter. Importantly, past experiences with police were predictive of current attitudes towards the police. Moreover, a negative bias was found with those who had a previous negative or mixed experience with police and this bias was more influential in an individual's opinion of the police. Internalized stigma, particularly stigma resistance, moderated the relationship between perceived procedural justice and police encounter evaluations. Specifically, high stigma resistance was associated with a positive police perception (Jones & Thomas, 2019). Given this, as officers increasingly respond to lower priority mental health-related calls for service, the importance of peaceful, cooperative, and efficient encounters becomes crucial.

## **TIERED POLICING**

Tiered policing is an alternative, cost-effective method to help reduce the number of lower priority calls for service that police attend. McKenna (2014) defined tiered policing as a “service delivery model that uses different categories of policing personnel,” such as implementing the use of Police Community Support Officers, Civilian Police Employees, Private Security, and Auxiliary Volunteers (p. 3). These additional tiers of non-sworn members are paid less than regular police officers, are easier to hire, and they cost less money to train (McKenna, 2014; Powell, 2014; Wilson & Weiss, 2014). Different tiers can provide support to police by responding to lower priority calls for service, take on time consuming administrative tasks, and complete other duties that do not require specialized police training, which offers sworn officers more time to respond to urgent calls (McKenna, 2014; Powell, 2014; Wilson & Weiss, 2014). Police forces, such as the Saanich and Victoria Police Departments, have considered adopting a tiered policing model, following in the footsteps of the Vancouver Police Department, who have already implemented a Community Safety Officer pilot project (Crescenzi, 2019; Depner, 2019; Powell, 2014).

However, some issues have been raised with implementing tiered policing models. In Australia, Police Liaison Officers are employed to establish rapport between police and Indigenous and other cultural communities, conduct foot patrols, attend community events, and assist sworn police officers (Cherney & Chui, 2010, 2011). A study conducted by Cherney and Chui (2011), found that improperly defined boundaries and the unclear nature of this support role were a major concern with the implementation of Police Liaison Officers. It appears that this is an understudied area that requires further empirical evidence to establish whether these models are effective.

## POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER/COMMUNITY SAFETY OFFICER

### UNITED KINGDOM

In England and Wales, the guidelines for Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) or Community Safety Officers<sup>14</sup> are stipulated under Section 38(2a) of the *Police Reform Act 2002*. Under section 38(1), “the chief officer of police or any police force may designate a relevant employee as an officer” (see Section 38 and schedule 4 in the *Police Reform Act 2002*). Police Community Support Officers hold powers appointed to them by the Chief Constable. Under *Part 1: Community Support Officers*, the Act outlines some of the powers and responsibilities Police Community Support Officers might be designated with, such as the power to issue fixed penalty notices, the power to require a name and address, the power to detain, the power to search individuals and to seize and retain items (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, controlled substances), the power to use reasonable force to detain a person, the power to disperse groups, and the power to enter a premise to save life and limb or prevent severe property damage (*Police Reform Act, 2002*).

To understand the effect and effectiveness of Police Community Support Officers, Ariel et al. (2016) conducted an experimental study randomly assigning 72 crime ‘hot spots’ for targeted patrol by either Police Community Support Officers or sworn police constables. This experiment was undertaken in Peterborough, a city in Cambridgeshire, England. The objective was to measure the crime-reduction effect of ‘soft’ (unarmed Community Support Officers) versus ‘hard’ (armed police constables) foot patrol approaches. Researchers operationalized ‘hot spots’ as a city area with a 150-meter radius and a minimum of 36 calls for police service in the two years preceding the study (Ariel et al., 2016). ‘Hot spots’ included street-level crimes in which foot patrol officers might serve as a deterrent, such as vehicle theft, graffiti, violence, and robberies (see Ariel et al., 2016). Researchers found that improvements in hot spots (i.e., reductions in crime and disorder) were not contingent upon hard policing foot patrol approaches. Ariel et al. (2016) interpreted “the evidence to suggest that the threat of sanctions may not necessarily be about the severity of force each agent can deploy on the spot, but rather the agent’s symbolic demonstration of the power of the police organisation” (p. 307). Results indicated the usefulness of Police Community Support Officers in preventing or dealing with lower-priority street-level crimes (e.g., graffiti) and deterring more serious crimes (e.g., robberies) while on foot patrol. Taking this into consideration, the authors concluded that Community Support Officers could free up constables to respond to emergency calls for service as Police Community Support Officers should be able to adequately conduct foot patrol duties and respond to lower-priority service needs in the community.

Despite Police Community Support Officers being an essential part of law enforcement in the United Kingdom, since the start of the program, many support officers have reported experiencing resistance from sworn members in the department (see Camargo, 2020). For example, Police Community Support Officers have reported experiencing hostility (e.g., “imposter” or “wannabe copper”), humiliation, and lack of belongingness from constables in the department. Based on this rejection, some Police Community Support Officers try to disguise their “support status” by wearing high-visibility jackets over their “PCSO [Police Community Support Officer] markings” to look more

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<sup>14</sup> The literature uses both terms interchangeably.

like Police Constables. Moreover, it has been noted that their role legitimacy is often challenged (Camargo, 2020). Scholars have found three distinct types of occupational identities among Police Community Support Officers: (1) *The Professional PCSO* who accepts their intended role in the department and understands their value; (2) *The Frustrated PCSO* who identifies with the crime-fighting and control aspect of the job and aspires to one day be a police officer; and (3) *The Disillusioned PCSO* who exhibits severe frustration with the lack of variety in their duties and restricted enforcement powers (see Cosgrove, 2016). So, while there are clear benefits associated with Police Community Support Officers, their lack of acceptance within the law enforcement “family” and the dissonance between their goals and role opportunities can produce challenges and difficulties for the PCSO and the police department (see Cosgrove, 2016).

## CANADA

On Vancouver Island, in the city of Langford, a Community Safety Officer pilot program was implemented in 2006 to decrease the reliance on overqualified RCMP constables to carry out bylaw enforcement duties in the community (Walby & Lippert, 2014). The Community Safety Officer program’s objective was to train and prepare Municipal Bylaw Enforcement Officers for Community Safety Officer responsibilities. These included enforcing city bylaws, such as vandalism, noise complaints, anti-social behaviour, substance use, and bike patrol. One year after the pilot program’s initial implementation, there were five fully trained Community Safety Officers in Langford (Walby & Lippert, 2014). These recruits had various previous ‘policing’ experiences, such as Auxiliary training in the RCMP or Provincial Parks Operations. Further, Community Safety Officers typically have training in conflict resolution and de-escalation, crime reduction and prevention, restorative justice, and self-defence (see Haywood et al., 2009).

Walby and Lippert (2014) reported that the Langford Community Safety Officer program provided “efficiencies in community policing because RCMP detachments were overtasked and understaffed” (p. 350). They also produced a cost savings to the city’s budget, as two Community Safety Officers’ salaries were equivalent to one sworn RCMP officer. The RCMP perceived Community Safety Officers as an important addition to their department as they would assist in traffic control or provide other supports to constables on accident/crime scenes (see Walby & Lippert, 2014).

In 2008, the RCMP “E” Division<sup>15</sup> introduced a Community Safety Officer pilot program based on the similar procedures implemented in England, Wales, and closer to home in Langford. A total of 17 Community Safety Officers were employed in the RCMP “E” Division during the pilot (Zytaruk, 2014). Community Safety Officers were used for crime prevention, patrol in community hot spots, visibility in the community, police assistance (e.g., back-up, traffic stops, emergency response, documenting statements), and community liaison duties (Walby & Lippert, 2014). Community Safety Officers are unarmed (except for pepper spray and a baton), uniformed peace officers meant to deal with lower-priority or low-risk duties under the guidance of a sworn RCMP officer (MacRae, 2008; Walby & Lippert, 2014). After five years of service, Community Safety Officers made \$63,993

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<sup>15</sup> Surrey, Langley, Ridge Meadows, and Prince George (see Walby & Lippert, 2014).

annually (Zytaruk, 2014). In 2014, sworn RCMP officers with five years of service made \$82,108 annually (RCMP, 2017).

In an analysis of Community Safety Officers programs operating internationally, Walby and Lippert (2014) argued that Canadian cities were mentioned in the United Kingdom's Police Community Support Officer model as part of the motivation for piloting and adopting their program. Although the authors noted that:

Every national, regional, and local policing organisation's strategic orientation differs, which can lead to mutation when policies are borrowed from international or regional sites and applied locally. The first mutation did not occur with the initial Canadian uptake of the CSO [Community Safety Officer] policy idea in Langford. Rather, policy mutation occurred as the policy idea was transferred within British Columbia and adopted by the RCMP (p. 355).

In effect, an issue with adoption of the program from the UK to Canada was that, while the Langford model more closely followed the UK approach, as the RCMP more broadly adopted the program, the implementation became less consistent, which might affect outcomes. For example, the Community Safety Officers in the RCMP "E" Division was to "complement their regular duty officers" whereas in the Langford model Community Safety Officers were used as a substitute for police constables (Walby & Lippert, 2014, p. 353). It is unclear whether Community Safety Officers experienced similar treatment to that of PCSOs in the United Kingdom, such as legitimacy issues and lack of belonging in the department (e.g., Camargo, 2020). Although, former Surrey RCMP Chief Superintendent Bill Fordy stated that "They [Community Constables] are a tremendous value to us" (Zytaruk, 2014, p. 13).

Despite this, in 2015, the Community Safety Officer program was removed, (see RCMP, 2018c; Zytaruk, 2014). Former Surrey RCMP Chief Superintendent Bill Fordy stated that the Community Safety Officer pilot program was evaluated and suggested "that there are more meaningful programs [e.g., Community Constable] that could provide the same service to communities, and I think a part of that might have been ensuring the safety of the CSO's as well, themselves" (Zytaruk, 2014, p. 17). Still, the Community Constable Pilot Program was launched shortly after that, in 2016, in the RCMP "E" Division and elsewhere.

An RCMP Community Constable Pilot Program Evaluation report was released in 2018 that reviewed the program over a one-year duration in Division "D", "F", "K", "E", and "G".<sup>16</sup> Community Constables differ from Community Safety Officers because they are armed, and uniformed peace officers have the same level of training as sworn constables, apart from access to the higher investigative courses (RCMP, 2018c). Most interviewees from the community (86 per cent) indicated that the Community Constable program had a positive effect on community-police communication, enhanced the relationship between the public and the police, and increased accessibility to RCMP services (see RCMP, 2018c). Nearly 70% of RCMP interviewees reported that the Community Constables program had improved police-community relations, and approximately 85% of supervisors stated that Community Constables improved service delivery (see RCMP,

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<sup>16</sup> The evaluation was conducted from April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017 (RCMP, 2018c).

2018c). Despite these improvements, the research found that Community Constables' "roles and responsibilities were not clearly understood" (RCMP, 2018c, section 6, para. 5).

In a similar way, the Vancouver Police Department implemented a new neighbourhood response team to handle lower priority crime (e.g., street disorder, proactive patrols) and rising public safety concerns. The team was formed after a community survey indicated that 78% of citizens were concerned about crime in Vancouver, and 61% perceived that crime in the city over the past year got worse (Larsen, 2020; Luymes, 2020; VPD, 2020b). Deputy Chief Constable Howard Chow told CBC News that "this team is going to be dealing with those lower priority calls like the person that's using drugs in the park, like the person that may be sleeping in your doorway and you can't get in or out of your building, like the person that may be scaring away your customers in front of your business" (Larsen, 2020, para. 3). In under two weeks, the neighbourhood response team responded to approximately 300 incidents, and within two months, 1,400 incidents. Of note, the calls for service were predominately concentrated in the downtown core of Vancouver (Luymes, 2020; VPD, 2020a).

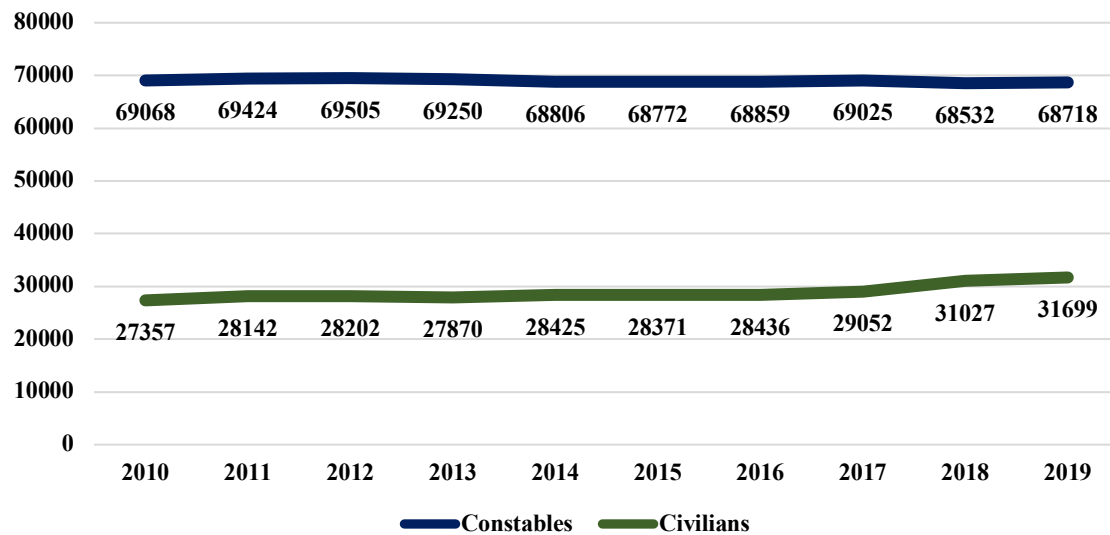
## **CIVILIAN POLICE EMPLOYEES**

### **CANADA & UNITED STATES**

Over the past two decades, the number of civilian police employees has increased exponentially in several Western countries (e.g., Canada, United States, and Britain). In these countries, the proportion of civilian police employees have risen twice as much as sworn constables (42% versus 21%; see Conor et al., 2019; Kiedrowski et al., 2017). In Canada, Statistics Canada data demonstrated that the proportion of civilian personnel in police departments has risen from 28.4% in 2010 to 31.6% in 2019, a total increase of 3.2% over ten years, whereas the number of sworn constables has remained stable. Civilian positions can vary from "clerks, dispatchers, managers, cadets, special constables, security officers, school crossing guards, and by-law enforcement officers" (Conor et al., 2020, see Figure 5).



**FIGURE 5: TOTAL NUMBER OF SWORN CONSTABLES AND CIVILIAN POLICE STAFF FROM 2010 TO 2019 IN CANADA**



The RCMP employs two types of civilian support staff: (1) Civilian Members (see the *RCMP Act*) and (2) Public Service Employees (see the *Public Service Employment Act*). The types of roles and salaries (when available) include:

- *Administrative Support* – e.g., *Administrative Position at RCMP*; salary: ~\$47,729 to \$57,643
- *Air and Marine Operations*
- *Community and Cultural Affairs* – e.g., *Communications Specialist at RCMP*; salary: ~\$71,599 to \$77,368
- *Criminal Intelligence*
- *Forensics*
- *Human Resources* – e.g., *HR at Canadian Security Intelligence Service*; salary: ~\$73,970 to \$89,970
- *Information Technology* – e.g., *Information Systems Analyst at RCMP*; salary: ~\$60,572 to \$68,338
- *Law*
- *Psychologist* – *Psychologist position at RCMP*; salary \$121,643
- *Research and Analysis*
- *Technical investigative engineers and software engineers*
- *Technicians and Technologists* – e.g., *Firearms Technician at RCMP*; salary: ~\$62,556 to \$71,124
- *Telecommunications Operator (9-1-1- Dispatcher)* – *9-1-1 Operator at RCMP*; salary: ~\$66,496
- *Wellness and Safety* – *Occupational Safety Officer at RCMP*; salary: ~\$77,098 to \$93,799 (Government of Canada, 2021; RCMP, 2019a, para. 11).

Similarly, the VPD has numerous civilian roles with approximately 400 civilian members working in different areas (e.g., criminal intelligence). The Los Angeles Police Department lists over 150 distinct types of civilian job classifications, from warehouse and toll room worker to forensic specialist (Los Angeles Police Department [LAPD], 2021). In Australia, civilian jobs are referred to

as professional “non-policing” jobs and encompass IT, business support, finance, forensics, and human resource support (Australian Federal Police [AFP], n.d.). Australian Federal Police applicants must complete character clearance (see Section 24 of the Australian Federal Police Act 1979) and an employment suitability questionnaire (AFP, n.d.).

In Canada, eligibility for civilian jobs includes, at minimum, being 18 years old, a Canadian citizen or permanent resident, and passing police security clearance (VPD, n.d.-a). The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) has roughly 600 civilian members in positions, such as client support, crisis counselor, “court liaison, records management, financial operations, community outreach, and human resources” (OPS, n.d.). Similar to the RCMP and VPD, all OPS civilian members must pass a background check. Based on information from the United States, a background check might include several elements. For example, New York Police Department civilian members must complete a background check during the hiring process that includes a personal history survey, criminal record check, school record check, employment record check, and military record check (New York Police Department [NYPD], n.d.).

In a Public Safety Canada report entitled *The Civilianization of Police in Canada*, Kiedrowski et al. (2017) explored the advantages (e.g., financial, and non-financial/service-related) and disadvantages of civilian employees to Canadian police departments. Researchers conducted a literature review, collected surveys from 18 police departments across Canada and conducted follow-up interviews with ten of these departments. The authors found that there was a cost savings of using civilian employees over sworn constables; however, the lower salaries, job dissatisfaction, high burnout, high turnover rates, and “second class” status of civilian employees revealed a more complicated relationship. The cost benefits of hiring civilian employees may be overstated due to these issues.

Recent research demonstrated that, like sworn constables, civilian staff experienced burnout because of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and exposure to traumatic events (Adams & Mastracci, 2020; Lentz et al., 2020). These researchers stated that “although civilians are not “police” it is inaccurate to claim they are not “policing” given the organisation weight they carry and the proportion of the employee base they represent” (Adams & Mastracci, 2020, p. 325). Civilian police employees were found to have roughly a two-fold increase in depression compared to police constables, while constables were more likely to score higher on alcohol disorder screening tools than civilian employees (Lentz et al., 2020). These findings suggest that civilian police staff play an integral role in departments and provide support to constables in a multitude of administration and investigation areas, but that both civilians and sworn members are at risk for developing burnout and mental health-related problems in these professions (Adams & Mastracci, 2020; Lentz et al., 2020).

## PRIVATE AND MUNICIPAL CORPORATE SECURITY

Globally, private security service providers have increased exponentially (Montgomery & Griffiths, 2016). For instance, in Canada, over a ten-year period (1991 to 2001), private security providers rose by nearly 70%. This increase in security personnel has well-surpassed police officers' numbers

(see Montgomery & Griffiths, 2016; Sanders, 2005). In British Columbia, there was a rapid and massive 283% increase in security licenses over a 12-year period, while a more gradual 24% increase was seen in the number of sworn constables. Further, publicly funded municipal, corporate security (MCS) services have also emerged nationwide (Walby et al., 2014a). Although there is a paucity of academic research on Municipal Corporate Security (MCS), a qualitative study using 36 interviews with MCS personnel in Canada showed that, from the perspective of MCS personnel, police and security units provided very different services in the community. One interviewee stressed that “not every police officer is a security expert” demonstrating that illustrated that MCS was delivering a very different type of service (Walby et al., 2014a, p. 265). Several interviewees suggested that police are not trained on threat-risk assessment, security technology, or security methods, which suggests that security is becoming increasingly specialized. Moreover, it was suggested that MCS are overtly proactive whereas policing is typically much more reactive (Walby et al., 2014a). The differences and similarities between public police constables and security guards (both public and private) are outlined in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PUBLIC POLICE OFFICERS AND SECURITY PROFESSIONALS**

	<b>Public Police Officers</b>	<b>Security Professional</b>
<b>Employer</b>	Government.	Private companies or government.
<b>Duties</b>	Patrol communities to keep the public safe, maintain order and enforce laws and regulations; investigate crimes and accidents; look for, find and manage evidence; interview witnesses, people suspected of criminal activity and others involved in the activities they are investigating; take notes and write reports; provide testimony in courts of law; arrest criminal suspects; provide support and help to victims and witnesses of crimes, accidents and natural disasters; create and participate in crime prevention, public information and safety programs; may oversee and co-ordinate the work of other police officers; community awareness and relationship building.	Control access to establishments; operate security control-room equipment; patrol assigned areas to guard against theft, vandalism and fire; enforce regulations to maintain order and resolve conflicts; monitor establishment activities; ensure safety and emergency procedures are followed; issue passes and direct visitors to appropriate areas; check age identification of patrons; perform security checks of passengers and luggage at airports; drive and guard armoured trucks; pick-up and deliver cash and valuables to banks, automated teller machines and retail establishments; investigate unlawful acts of employees or patrons of establishments; recommend security systems such as electronic detection devices and access devices; conduct investigations to locate missing persons; obtain information for use in civil and criminal litigation matters or for other purposes; may also conduct polygraph tests (integrity surveys) for clients; prevent and detect shoplifting and theft in retail establishments.

<b>Legislation</b>	BC Laws: e.g., Police Act (RSBC 1996) and Offence Act (RSBC 1996).	BC Laws: e.g., Security Services Act (2007) and Security Services Regulation (2017).
<b>Training</b>	Three-to-six-month police training program. E.g., RCMP officer training is 26 weeks at RCMP’s training academy (Depot) in Regina, Saskatchewan, and followed-up with in-field training.	Successful completion of the Basic Security Training (BST) course with a minimum of 60%, or 75% for commissionaires. Additional training may be required depending on the company and security duties: e.g., successful completion of firearms training for armoured car guards.
<b>Education Level</b>	A secondary school (i.e., high school) diploma is required. A college program or university degree is preferred and, in some cases, required.	Do not need a secondary school graduation, although, this is a preferred qualification.
<b>Salaries</b>	According to WorkBC (2021), in 2019, the annual median salary for police officers was \$86,240. BC hourly wages range from \$28.26 to \$53.33.	According to WorkBC (2021), in 2019, the annual median salary for security guards was \$32,097. BC hourly wages range from \$13.85 to \$27.00.
<b>BC Agencies</b>	E.g., RCMP, VPD, Delta Police Department, New Westminster Police Department.	E.g., G4S Canada, Paladin Group, Securiguard Services Ltd., Commissionaires, GardaWorld.

*Note.* Sourced from Commissionaires (2018), Government of British Columbia (n.d.-b), RCMP (2020c) and WorkBC (2021a, 2021b).

In a Public Safety Canada report, researchers explored the relationship, cooperation, and exchange of duties and responsibilities between private security and public policing in various Western countries.<sup>17</sup> They found that private security can make a noteworthy contribution to community safety (Montgomery & Griffiths, 2016). One RCMP Superintendent interviewee stated that private security was essential in the management and monitoring of a homeless camp when police were under-resourced to “respond to increased calls for service for loud noise, open liquor, property crime issues” and in cases of more serious offences such as assaults, overdoses, security notified police to deal with these incidents (Montgomery & Griffiths, 2016, p. 57). This outsourcing of resources was helpful to assist an overtaxed police department.

Other cities have noted an interagency partnership between public police and private security. In the United States, the Minneapolis Police Department organized a joint radio channel to improve communication in the downtown core. According to the Minneapolis Police Department, this interagency partnership has led to a decrease in robberies (Montgomery & Griffiths, 2016). A similar relationship between public police and private security is demonstrated in Australia’s “Eyes

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<sup>17</sup> The United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (see Montgomery & Griffiths, 2016).

on the Street” initiative, whereby private security is encouraged to communicate intel with police (Prenzler & Sarre, 2012).

## AUXILIARY/VOLUNTEER POLICE

### CANADA

In Canada, the RCMP developed the Auxiliary Program in 1963 to “enhance community policing and crime prevention initiatives” (RCMP, 2018a, para. 1). Auxiliaries are unarmed volunteers who are specially trained, and who must commit to a minimum of two years with the program (R.C.M.P., 2018a). In 2016, the RCMP Auxiliary Constable Program (ACP) changed after a national review following two incidents: (1) the shooting death of Constable Nathan Cirillo in Ottawa in 2014, and (2) the shooting death of Constable David Wynn in 2015 at the Apex Casino in Alberta (Keeler, 2016). The second incident also resulted in Constable Wynn’s auxiliary partner, Derek Bond, being seriously injured (Keeler, 2016). After the national review, the RCMP executive committee terminated auxiliary firearm orientations and ‘ride-alongs’ with fully sworn police officers (Union of BC Municipalities [UBCM], 2016).<sup>18</sup> Additional recommendations to the ACP included implementing an activity matrix consisting of a tiered model for auxiliary constables, training expectations, and changes to volunteer uniforms to distinguish them more clearly from sworn officers (UBCM, 2016). According to the RCMP (2018b), the Auxiliary Program now has three tiers, with tier one being the most basic, tier two including more training and activities, and tier three having the most training and ability to perform more activities. More specifically, Tier 1 grants RCMP auxiliaries the chance to be involved in community policing services, such as “neighbourhood watch program, public education initiatives, non-enforcement support to operations, community fundraising events and participation in parades and public ceremonies” (RCMP, 2018d, para. 3). In addition to Tier 1 duties, Tier 2 auxiliaries can engage in “community presence via foot and bicycle, access and traffic control, and disaster assistance” (RCMP, 2018d, para. 4). Tier 3 auxiliaries have Tier 1 and 2 activities in addition to a “general duty patrol, attending calls, check stops, scene security and search of persons” (RCMP, 2018d, para. 5). See Table 3 for details on training and uniforms based on tiers.<sup>19</sup>

**TABLE 3: RCMP AUXILIARY TIERS 1-3: TRAINING AND UNIFORMS**

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<sup>18</sup> Firearm orientations were not used in British Columbia (UBCM, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Also see UBCM website for a description of Tiered policing for the RCMP.  
[https://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Resolutions~and~Policy/Policy/Community~Safety/Police~Services/RCMP\\_Auxiliary\\_Tiered\\_Program.pdf](https://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Resolutions~and~Policy/Policy/Community~Safety/Police~Services/RCMP_Auxiliary_Tiered_Program.pdf)

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Training	Online RCMP training courses including topics such as crime prevention, conduct, ethics, and Auxiliary orientation. External courses: Standard First Aid/CPR/AED course.	All Tier 1 Auxiliary training requirements with additional courses added.	All Tier 1 and Tier 2 Auxiliary training requirements with additional courses added.
Uniform	Grey polo shirt; Blue trouser with no stripe to be worn with a black belt and black ankle boots; Navy baseball cap/Navy toque (optional); Fluorescent 3-in-1 patrol jacket (optional).	Grey duty shirt; A high-visibility vest to be worn over the duty shirt at all times; Blue trouser with no stripe to be worn with a black leather belt and black ankle boots; Navy baseball cap/Navy toque; Fluorescent Yellow patrol jacket 3-in-1; Soft Body Armour; Duty Gloves; Slash Resistant Gloves; Duty Belt and Operational Accessories; Intervention Options (duty belt, baton, handcuffs, etc.); Inclement Weather Trousers; Bicycle Shirts and Shorts (duty dependent).	Tier 3 uniform is the same as the Tier 2 uniform.

*Note.* Information sourced from RCMP (2018b).

Like the RCMP, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Auxiliary team consists of unpaid volunteers that work alongside regular sworn members in Ontario, offering assistance in community-based duties, such as, but not limited to, traffic control, patrols, community events, and victim assistance. Auxiliaries wear different uniforms than regular members and do not have any police authority in ordinary circumstances (e.g., no ability to make arrests). However, in emergencies, Auxiliaries may be granted police authority to support full-time members in extenuating situations. Auxiliaries must meet the volunteer eligibility requirements related to education, lifestyle, community focus, employment, fitness, driving, leadership, motivation, communication skills, and other special skills. Furthermore, Auxiliaries undergo background and security checks and psychological, vision, and medical testing (Ontario Provincial Police [OPP], 2020). The TPS also has Auxiliaries that perform similar duties as OPP Auxiliary team members (see TPS, 2021b).

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**Volunteer Police.** The United States uses volunteer police officers, who are referred to in the academic literature as ‘reserve police’ and ‘auxiliary police’ (Dobrin, 2017). There are two types of volunteer police, those without police authority and those with some degree of police authority (Wolf & Bryer, 2020). Yet, depending on the state, volunteer police are utilized in very diverse ways. For example, ‘auxiliary’ non-sworn police in New York Police Department have no police authority (e.g., no arrest authority); however, they wear uniforms seemingly identical to full-time sworn officers, conduct patrol duties, and observe and report. In other states, these functions may more accurately resemble ‘citizen patrols’ (see Wolf & Bryer, 2020).

Volunteer police tend to assist in the overflow of low-priority calls for police services that frees-up sworn full-time members to respond to emergencies or higher-priority calls and which improves

community bonds (Dobrin, 2016). There are financial advantages to using volunteer police officers, as relatively cost-free labour minus initial training costs can save cities millions of dollars. In 2011, the Los Angeles Police had roughly 700 volunteer police officers that saved the city five million dollars (Dobrin, 2016). In addition to cost-savings, volunteer police can save departments time. For example, a naturalistic experiment conducted in Phoenix, Arizona tested the call completion times of officers with and without citizen volunteers' assistance on non-dangerous calls for service (i.e., lower priority calls; Baumann et al., 1987). Researchers established that police officers completed calls for service significantly faster with volunteer support on public welfare, mental health, and victim assistance calls. Officers were able to focus on collecting evidence, while volunteers offered support to victims and, in some cases, finished certain tasks so that officers could leave to respond to other calls. In effect, volunteer assistance saved officers approximately 60 hours over the duration of the study. Of note, Baumann et al. (1987) reported that volunteer assistance did not affect completion times for domestic dispute calls, which were considered more dangerous (Baumann et al., 1987). Although, these results are outdated, Baumann et al. (1987) offers a "methodologically robust" experimental investigation within the context of policing and lower priority calls for service specifically (see Myhill, 2006). To bolster these findings within a current day context, several other disciplines (e.g., medicine and healthcare) using different methodologies have supported the notion that volunteers were beneficial for organisational cost-savings and worker time-savings. For instance, survey research showed that volunteers within a hospital setting provided "many soft services" for patients that improved their comfort levels throughout a hospital stay (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004). It was suggested that "volunteers may reduce and support staff workload by taking on certain tasks and leaving staff members freer to concentrate on other tasks" (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004, p. 44). Extending these results to a police-volunteer context, we can see how volunteer police can provide "soft services" or deal with a substantial proportion of the lower priority calls for service that should free-up constables to attend to high priority or emergency situations. Gaston and Alexander (2001) gathered survey responses from current and former unpaid Special Constables (i.e., volunteers) and regular sworn officers (n = 1,226) in police departments in England and Wales to better understand Special Constables' motivations, experiences, and relationships with regular officers. The authors discovered five main reasons Special Constables joined the force as volunteers: (1) interest in becoming a sworn member; (2) help the community; (3) gain valuable insight on police duties; (4) to contribute in a valuable way; and (5) a concern for law and order (Gaston & Alexander, 2001).

Despite these benefits, there are several disadvantages to departments with volunteer police officers. During times of economic decline or union strikes, volunteer officers can replace sworn officers, which can break down department cohesion and foster resentment (Dobrin, 2016). Regular members may perceive police volunteers as motivated by self-serving reasons (i.e., ~61% reported that volunteers join to gain status and power or to wear the police uniform; see Gaston & Alexander, 2001). This finding may begin to explain the lack of trust in the police-volunteer relationship. Further, the cost-savings of using volunteer police may be overstated depending on the level of training and benefits (e.g., insurance coverage) provided to volunteer workers. Given the high-risk nature of policing duties, volunteers are at-risk of experiencing negative interaction with citizens, psychological or physical trauma, and negative impacts on their personal relationships (Dobrin, 2016). As stated by Dobrin and Wolf (2016):

volunteer officers play an important yet under-studied role in the modern American police. Ideally, discussion and policies concerning volunteer police should be data driven and evidence based. Unfortunately, there is very little quality data on the role, authority, responsibilities and duties of volunteer police and discussion based solely on evidence would be very limited (p. 220).

In a recent manuscript, Wolf and Bryer (2020) focused on outcomes associated with non-sworn police volunteers in the United States. There are three major volunteer police functions: assist in law enforcement or investigation duties; maintain public order; and provide community outreach services. The following benefits presented in the Table 4 below are outcomes associated with these functions:

**TABLE 4: THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEER POLICE**

Type of Benefit	Outcome
<b>Volunteer benefits</b>	Skill development, networking, improvement in health/social relationships.
<b>Beneficiary benefits</b>	Those who received mentorship/outreach services delivered by volunteers showed improvements in academic performance, skill development, positive attitudes, and behavioural outcomes.
<b>Institution benefits</b>	Institutions increased in efficiency, saved on costs, and increased services/supports for citizens in the community.
<b>Community benefits</b>	Communities experienced safer neighbourhoods, investigation assistance, youth programs, community emergency response teams, and patrol.

*Note.* Information sourced from Wolf and Bryer (2020).

A study conducted by Dobrin (2017) collected data regarding the number of sworn volunteer police officers per state in the United States. These sworn volunteer officers (SVOs) typically wear uniforms similar to regular police officers, are armed, and have some powers of arrest (Dobrin, 2017). The number of SVOs vary per state, from zero to upwards of 6,000 SVOs (Dobrin, 2017). Furthermore, a study from the United States claimed that, in 2013, approximately 36% of local law enforcement and sheriff agencies used SVOs, with a total of nearly 55,000 SVOs (Malega & Garner, 2019). The American states with the largest number of known SVOs include Arkansas, California, Indiana, Missouri, Ohio, and Oklahoma (Dobrin, 2017). According to Dobrin (2017), it is important to note that some of the data may include volunteers that are paid, as some American states do not track this information. This study also mentioned other volunteer positions within policing, including citizens on patrol, neighbourhood watch liaisons, and search and rescue teams, but did not include them in the collection of data for SVOs (Dobrin, 2017).

Malega and Garner (2019) noted that the number of SVOs have decreased by 29% from 1999 to 2013. Despite this, in 2013, SVOs accounted for 7% of all sworn police personnel in the United States, while paid part-time sworn personnel only accounted for 5% (Malega & Garner, 2019). Malega and Garner (2019) investigated the correlates of agencies and communities with SVOs. This included an analysis of the associated socioeconomic community characteristics of areas where SVO's were likely to be deployed. Results indicated that SVOs were more likely to be used in jurisdictions with large populations, in sheriff's offices (versus local police), and in areas with



greater social disadvantage, such as those with higher poverty rates or residential mobility, as these communities were likely to have a greater need for police services.

Randol and Gaffney (2014) considered the differences between volunteers from community-oriented policing (COP) programs and block watch volunteers. They found that an important motivator for citizens to volunteer with community crime prevention programs was if the public had a positive perception of the police (Randol & Gaffney, 2014). This finding is consistent with another study conducted by Porumbescu et al. (2019) that examined how public perceptions of the police affected citizens' participation in neighbourhood watch programmes. However, this study argued that both positive and negative perceptions of the police influenced participation, as those with positive police perceptions wanted to be a part of an effective system and those with negative police perceptions felt a greater need to participate because they did not find the police trustworthy (Porumbescu et al., 2019). Furthermore, the only noteworthy difference found between COP program volunteers and block watch volunteers was that COP program volunteers were more likely to be of a racial minority and have been a victim of crime (Randol & Gaffney, 2014). Other comparisons of demographics between volunteers of both programs were similar, with volunteers having higher incomes, positive perceptions of police, and volunteer experience with additional clubs or organisations (Randol & Gaffney, 2014). However, de Guzman and Kim (2017) noted that if police departments were put under pressure and faced organisational constraints, they were more inclined to minimize their COP programs.

## UNITED KINGDOM

**Special Constables.** England has been using volunteer police, also known as Special Constables, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century and, as of 2013, they have approximately 20,000 members (Pepper, 2014; Whittle, 2014). According to Pepper (2014), many members of the Special Constabulary wanted to become regular police officers, so they volunteered as special constables to help them decide if policing was a suitable career, as well as to further their potential career path. However, there are challenges related to the retention of volunteers and questions as to whether Special Constables are an expensive resource (Whittle, 2014). Even though special constables are unpaid volunteers, the yearlong process of recruitment, training, and providing equipment becomes costly (Whittle, 2014). If volunteers are not contributing sufficient hours or leave after a short period of time, the monetary loss quickly adds up. According to Whittle (2014), police forces do not see an investment return in Special Constable volunteers until after one year of service noting that several changes that can be made to increase retention, as well as the monetary value of volunteers. Understanding why volunteers leave is an important first step so that changes can be made to the program based on the reasons for resignation (Whittle, 2014). One way to mitigate financial loss is to increase the minimum volunteer hour requirements for Special Constables who join with the intent to become a regular police officer, to compensate for a shorter volunteer career (Whittle, 2014).

Special Constables have the same duties, responsibilities, and authorization as full-time police officers. Special Constables are paired with a regular member and assist in all frontline duties, such as public safety, investigations, crime reduction, and prevention (Avon & Somerset Police, n.d.; Bullock & Leeney, 2016). They wear the same uniform, radio, and protective gear as full-time police

officers and are expected to maintain at least 16 hours of volunteer work per month. Although Special Constables are granted similar duties to regular officers, they are restricted from working past 3 am for safety reasons (Avon & Somerset Police, n.d.). Special Constables have the following duties: community safety; bystanders or victim's safety at accidents, fires, or crime scenes; foot patrol or proactive policing duties to deter criminal activities; respond to domestic disturbances or anti-social behaviour in the community; enforce traffic laws; conduct door-to-door enquiries for investigations; assist in arresting offenders; court duties; report writing; and annual training (Avon & Somerset Police, n.d.). As previously discussed, a similar support program exists in Canada called the Community Constable program. These Special Constables undergo Depot training and work alongside sworn members to provide "tactical, enforcement, and investigational support" (Public Safety Canada, 2013, para. 1).

Special Constable volunteers are an invaluable resource to police departments in the United Kingdom. HMIC has advocated for increased inclusion of Special Constables in police departments:

these officers make a significant contribution, especially in the smaller communities, to an efficient policing service. Police effectiveness would be challenged if they did not turn out for duty. Positive action is required now to halt the decline, where it exists, and attract new recruits to the Special Constabulary. It is a very worthwhile goal for forces (see H. M. Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2006, p. 45).

In the United Kingdom, Special Constables not only provide an effective cost-saving resource for police departments (Whittle, 2017), but they also enhance community representation, community engagement, police legitimacy, and trust in communities by acting as the "bridge" between law enforcement and citizens (Bullock, 2015; Dickson, 2019; Fielding, 1995).

**Volunteers.** Beginning in the 1990's, Police Support Volunteers (PSVs) began to join the force in England, Wales, Canada, and Australia (i.e., Volunteers in Policing; VIPs). PSVs have various supportive roles, such as crime prevention, public order, administrative duties, and victim services (see NSW Government, n.d.; Pepper et al., 2020). In Canada, the RCMP website outlines 11 specific PSV role examples, including "block watch, Operation Red Nose, bike patrol, airport watches, auxiliary program, search and rescue, pipes and drum band, victim services program, community advisory committee, citizens on patrol, and community police offices" (RCMP, 2020b para. 3). These roles have cost-saving and service delivery benefits in police detachments. PSVs free-up officers to respond to emergency calls for service and act to enhance response times, service delivery, accountability, community engagement, and reduce the task burden on officers. Many PSVs offer diverse skill sets, such as technology-related expertise (see Pepper et al., 2020).

Despite these benefits, there are difficulties in matching volunteers to suitable and useful placements, instead of assigning PSVs tasks with little-or-no value (i.e., "busy work"). The perceived overuse of volunteers has also led to allegations of replacing sworn member positions with civilian volunteers, which has caused tension and resentment within some policing agencies. Others have questioned the cost-saving benefits of using PSVs by arguing that a "considerable infrastructure investment" is required before financial benefits occur (see Pepper et al., 2020, p. 3).

It has been found that there are different types of PSVs. Based on survey research, there are two broad kinds of PSVs ( $n = 140$ ): (1) Motivated PSVs and (2) Role-focused PSVs. Motivated PSVs are

driven to engage in police volunteering to help their community or develop personal or occupational skills (e.g., The Altruistic PSV). Role-focused PSVs are attentive to their operational or non-operational contributions to the force and community, such as analyzing how their roles influence the service they deliver to citizens (e.g., The Operational PSV).

Furthermore, Wells and Millings (2019) examined the perceptions of senior police decision-makers regarding the potential benefits and drawbacks of Community Speedwatch (CSW) programs in England and Wales. CSW programs are volunteer driven programs that help target lower-level offences in communities, particularly traffic related concerns, such as speeding and distracted driving (Wells & Millings, 2019). Responses regarding the program varied, but were mainly positive, noting the volunteering empowered the community by offering citizens an opportunity to play a role in improving their safety. The program was also considered a low cost and resource-light program (Wells & Millings, 2019). However, senior police decision-makers interviewed in this same study were concerned about volunteers being 'good' people and that if volunteers did not see improvements in safety, they might lose interest and the program might diminish (Wells & Millings, 2019).

## LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION

There exists limited scholarly research exploring the ways that police respond to specific types of lower priority calls for service. Future studies should examine the most common types of lower priority calls for service, describe how police respond to those calls, and discuss possible ways to minimize or reduce the resources consumed by those specific calls for service. There is also a dearth of scholarly research on tiered policing. Additional research should focus on the benefits, drawbacks, and overall effectiveness of a tiered policing approach, as well as other volunteer initiatives such as citizens on patrol programs. While there is some scholarly research surrounding volunteer and auxiliary police, further research can explore the roles of volunteer police and ways to ensure police forces are getting their monetary value from volunteers, and in all these studies, the potential risks of these programs should be considered.

Police are responding to an increasing number of calls for service, with each individual call varying in priority. This combined with constricting police budgets, the demand for faster response times, and the need for positive public perception means that police organisations must implement effective and efficient responses to lower priority calls for service. Examples discussed such as the co-responder model, online reporting, tiered policing, and volunteer police are all possible ways that police can respond to lower priority calls for service, though the evidence base for their effectiveness and efficiency is lacking. However, police organisations should carefully consider the options that are best for them based on individual community needs, budget restrictions, and the strategic goals they are trying to achieve by implementing new strategies, whether that be cost effectiveness, faster response times, or improved public perceptions.

## Project Methodology

The objectives of this project were achieved through quantitative and qualitative research methods. The project was broken down into two key elements.

### **Review of Data on Lower Priority Calls for Service**

An important part of framing the discussion about how best to address lower priority calls for service is to have a good understanding of the nature and quantity of these calls in a sample of Lower Mainland RCMP Detachments and municipal police departments. To achieve this, researchers worked with RCMP “E” Division Operations Strategy Branch (OSB) to obtain data on the number and nature of lower priority calls for service for all RCMP Detachments and municipal police departments in British Columbia for 2018, 2019, and 2020. The data was analysed in the aggregate, by year, and in each of the four RCMP districts (Lower Mainland, Island, North, and South-East). Municipal police departments were included in the district level analyses.

### **Interviews with Police Executives and Officers**

Interviews were conducted with selected supervisors in the Operations sections of a sample of Lower Mainland RCMP Detachments and municipal police departments. In total, of the 23 RCMP detachments and municipal police departments in the Lower Mainland District, 12 RCMP detachments and municipal departments participated in interviews for this study. From these 12 policing agencies, 30 participants agreed to be interviewed for this project. All participants had extensive experience responding to calls for service and most were currently in positions where they managed or supervised members, teams, or units that responded to calls for service. Other participants were in senior management or leadership positions, including District Commanders or Officers in Charge. The purpose of the interviews was to learn what strategies and policies each detachment had for addressing and responding to lower priority calls for service, how effective they perceived their strategies and practices were, and their perceptions of the strengths and limitations of those approaches. Particular attention focused on the degree to which police agencies deployed non-sworn members, the training and recruitment of community constables or other non-sworn members, and the specific types of calls for service that are not responded to by a sworn member.

The interviews provided the researchers with information about the various activities undertaken by the police agency to respond to lower priority calls for service, how these responses were organized and prioritized, participants’ perceived outcomes of their current practices, and the challenges they faced. The interviews also highlighted police perceptions of what was working well, as well as where there might be gaps in effective and efficient responses. In addition, the interviews addressed what police were doing and how they were partnering with others to reduce calls for service and the demand for a police resource response.

All interviews were conducted by the principal investigators with current RCMP Security Clearances. The interviews were conducted via online conferencing. Participation in the interview was voluntary. Those willing to participate were provided with an information sheet prior to the interview with a detailed overview of the purpose and scope. Immediately before the interview began, all participants were again provided with the information sheet, and asked to verbally

consent to the interview. Interviews were not recorded using video or audio recording devices, and all information provided by participants was anonymized prior to analysis.

## Quantitative Data Results and Discussion

As mentioned above, call for service data was obtained from OSB RCMP “E” Division for the years 2018, 2019, and 2020. This included all calls for service for all police agencies in British Columbia. The data included the priority level assigned to each call for service. For the purposes of this analysis, Priority 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5+ were used. The priority level used in the analyses was based on the initial call type or the priority level set by the dispatcher at the time that the call was received. For the purposes of this study, a lower priority call for service was any call for service that was initially classified by dispatch as a Priority 3 or 4. While the dataset included calls that were initially assigned Priority 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9, Priority 5 and above are not ‘real’ priority codes. Instead, they are ‘dummy’ codes entered by dispatch to force a re-sorting of pending calls that are in the queue. In effect, if there are too many calls in the queue and dispatch knows that one call needs to be responded to before another, but both call types are a default Priority 2 call, the dispatcher might recode one of those two calls to a Priority 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9 to drop it down in the response queue, which is sorted by priority level. As a result, these categories have been combined with the understanding that some proportion of Priority 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9 calls were actually Priority 2 or 3 calls for service. It should be noted that the practice of using initial call prioritization and combining Priority 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 calls into the single category of Priority 5+ is the practice used by the Business Intelligence team at RCMP “E” Division when reporting on Computer Assisted Dispatch (CAD) data.

In 2018, there were 1,753,559 calls for service in British Columbia. Of these calls for service, 56.6% were from the Lower Mainland District, 16.3% were from the South-East District, 9.5% were from the North District, and 17.6% were from the Island District. As demonstrated in Table 5, while there were slight variations in the proportion of calls for service that were Priority 1, 2, 3, and 4 based on the policing district, 57.7% of all calls for service in British Columbia in 2018 were initially classified as Priority 3 or 4. This equates to just over one million calls for service (n = 1,011,012). In the Lower Mainland District, which is the focus of this report, Priority 3 and 4 calls for service accounted for 614,538 or 61.9% of all calls for service in the Lower Mainland in 2018.

**TABLE 5: CALLS FOR SERVICE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA IN 2018**

	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	Priority 5+
Lower Mainland District (n = 992,029)	5.6%	31.2%	42.4%	19.5%	1.3%
South-East District (n = 286,519)	4.8%	33.2%	47.6%	14.4%	0.0%
North District (n = 166,177)	6.4%	27.6%	51.5%	14.5%	0.0%
Island District (n = 308,834)	5.0%	26.3%	46.1%	22.0%	0.0%
Total for British Columbia (n = 1,753,559)	5.5%	30.3%	39.0%	18.7%	0.1%

The most common Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2018 in the Lower Mainland District were for theft (n = 63,664), property (n = 44,407), traffic incident (n = 38,673), assist general public (n =

37,240), unwanted person (n = 29,866), and disturbance (n = 29,732). In effect, these six call types (n = 243,562) accounted for 39.6% of all Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in the Lower Mainland District in 2018.

In 2019, there were 1,801,532 calls for service in British Columbia. This represented a 2.7% increase in the total number of calls for service compared to 2018. Of the total number of calls for service in 2019, 56.7% were from the Lower Mainland District, 16.2% were from the South-East District, 9.6% were from the North District, and 17.6% were from the Island District; nearly an identical distribution as found in 2018.

As demonstrated in Table 6, while there were slight variations in the proportion of calls for service that were Priority 1, 2, 3, and 4 based on policing district, 63.7% of all calls for service in British Columbia in 2019 were initially categorized as Priority 3 or 4. This equates to 1,148,146 calls for service or an 13.6% increase in the proportion of Priority 3 and 4 calls for service compared to 2018. In the Lower Mainland District, Priority 3 and 4 calls for service accounted for 628,931 or 62.4% of all calls for service in the district in 2019. Given this, there was a 2.4% increase in the total number of Priority 3 and 4 calls for service compared to 2018 or an additional 14,393 Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2019 compared to the previous year.

**TABLE 6: CALLS FOR SERVICE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA IN 2019**

	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	Priority 5+
Lower Mainland District (n = 1,021,511)	5.6%	31.4%	42.7%	18.9%	0.1%
South-East District (n = 291,180)	4.7%	32.9%	48.7%	13.7%	0.0%
North District (n = 172,247)	6.3%	26.7%	52.4%	14.6%	0.0%
Island District (n = 316,594)	5.4%	24.2%	46.3%	23.9%	0.2%
Total for British Columbia (n = 1,801,532)	5.5%	29.9%	45.2%	18.5%	0.1%

The most common Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2019 in the Lower Mainland District were the same as in the previous year. More specifically, the most common Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2019 were for theft (n = 65,986), property (n = 45,294), traffic incident (n = 38,791), assist general public (n = 37,401), unwanted person (n = 32,175), and disturbance (n = 29,718). In effect, these six call types (n = 219,647) accounted for 34.9% of all Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in the Lower Mainland District in 2019; a reduction of 9.8% of all Priority 3 and 4 calls for service compared to 2018. So, while the total number of Priority 3 and 4 calls for service increase in 2019, the proportion of calls within the aforementioned six call types actually decreased.

In 2020, there were 1,697,396 calls for service in British Columbia. This represented a 5.8% decrease in the total number of calls for service compared to 2019. This decrease should not be surprising given the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the total number of calls for service in 2020, 56.0% were from the Lower Mainland District, 16.9% were from the South-East District, 9.8% were from the North District, and 17.5% were from the Island District; nearly an identical distribution as found in the previous two years.

As demonstrated in Table 7, while there were slight variations in the proportion of calls for service that were Priority 1, 2, 3, and 4 based on policing district, 63.5% of all calls for service in British

Columbia in 2020 were classified initially as Priority 3 or 4. This equates to just over one million (n = 1,077,774) calls for service or an 6.1% decrease in the proportion of Priority 3 and 4 calls for service compared to 2019. In the Lower Mainland District, Priority 3 and 4 calls for service accounted for 580,955 or 62.4% of all calls for service in the district in 2020. Given this, there was a decrease of 7.6% in the total number of Priority 3 and 4 calls for service compared to the previous year.

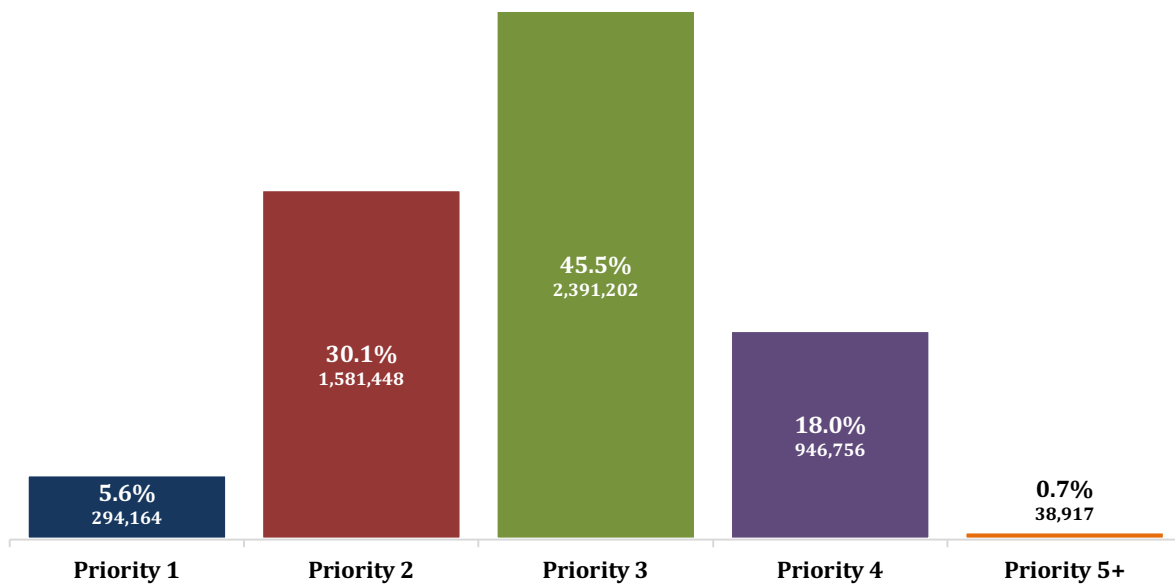
**TABLE 7: CALLS FOR SERVICE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA IN 2020**

	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	Priority 5+
Lower Mainland District (n = 948,044)	5.8%	31.9%	44.5%	16.7%	1.0%
South-East District (n = 285,642)	5.3%	32.6%	49.3%	12.8%	0.0%
North District (n = 166,846)	6.8%	25.6%	53.7%	13.9%	0.0%
Island District (n = 296,864)	6.2%	24.1%	46.7%	22.9%	0.0%
Total for British Columbia (n = 1,697,396)	5.9%	30.0%	46.6%	16.9%	0.1%

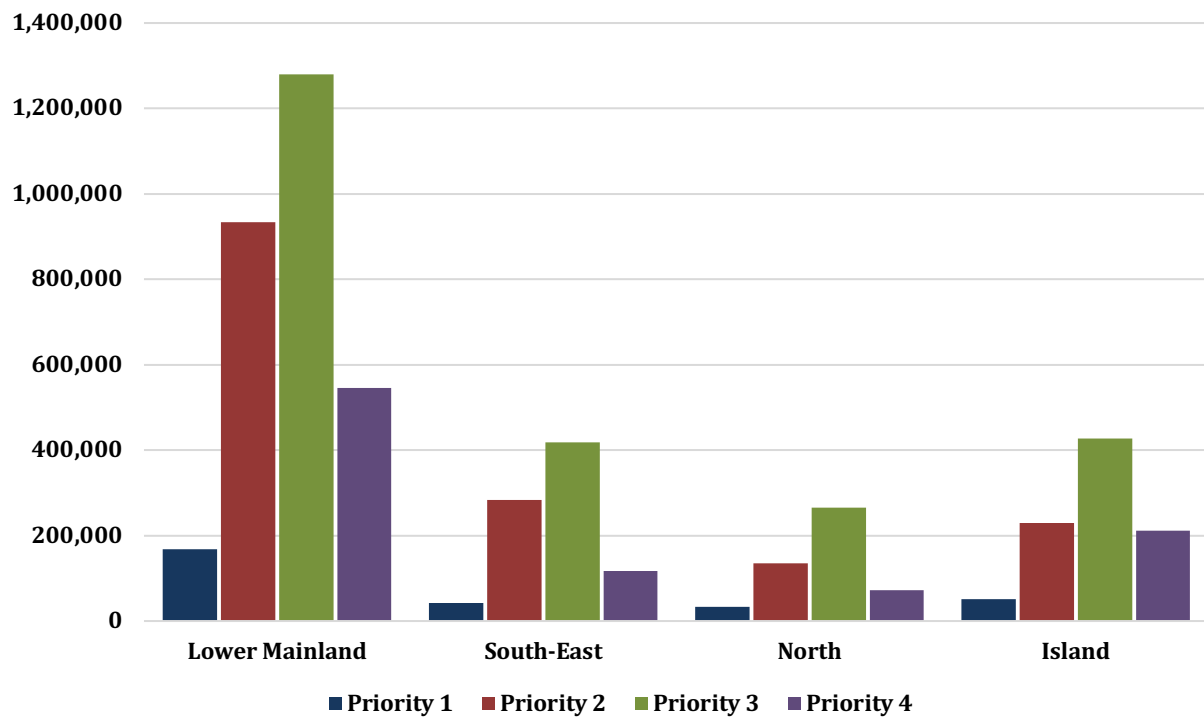
The most common Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2020 in the Lower Mainland District were generally the same as in the previous year. More specifically, the most common Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in 2020 were for theft (n = 41,043), unwanted person (n = 38,302), property (n = 35,458), traffic incident (n = 35,275), assist general public (n = 32,924), and disturbance (n = 32,178). In effect, these six call types (n = 215,180) accounted for 37.0% of all Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in the Lower Mainland District in 2020; a reduction of 2.0% of all Priority 3 and 4 calls for service compared to 2019.

In sum, considering the three years of data, there was a total of 5,252,487 calls for service in British Columbia. Of those, a total of 3,337,958 or 63.6% were initially classified as Priority 3 or 4 calls for service (see Figure 6). There were 1,824,424 Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in the Lower Mainland District or 61.6% of all calls for service in that district in 2018, 2019, and 2020, there were 536,397 Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in the South-East District (62.1 per cent), 337,847 Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in the North District (67.0 per cent), and 639,290 Priority 3 and 4 calls for service in the Island District (69.3 per cent) (see Figure 7).

**FIGURE 6: CALLS FOR SERVICE BY PRIORITY LEVELS (2018 – 2020)**



**FIGURE 7: PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE BY POLICE DISTRICT (2018 – 2020)**





## Qualitative Interviews Results and Discussion

### CALLS FOR SERVICE AND RESOURCES

Given the different sizes of police agencies in the Lower Mainland District, the distribution of crime across the Lower Mainland, and the population distribution, it was not surprising that there was quite a large range in the number of calls for service that each participating police agency typically received in a 24-hour period and the number of officers that were available to respond to these calls. Given this range, for the most part, respondents indicated that their police agency would respond to between 40 and 160 calls for service in a typical 24-hour period; however, for some police agencies, the number of calls for service was between 250 to 350. Of note, these figures referred to calls in which an officer was dispatched to the scene rather than a call that either the dispatcher or the police agency determined, in the first instance, that an officer was not required at the scene. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that all interviews for this report were conducted while British Columbia was in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, which likely had an effect on the number and type of calls for service in 2020 and 2021.

Most participants identified the maximum, minimum, and typical number of officers that were available each shift to respond to calls for service. While these numbers are not presented in this report as it might serve to identify the participating police agencies, it is important to note that many participants indicated that their police agency frequently had the minimum or just above the minimum number of police officers available each shift to respond to calls for service. The reasons given for this were vacancies, holidays, training, secondments, authorized leave, including long-term disability, mental health, medical emergencies, and parental leave, and duty to accommodate members. Some participants indicated that when they were running low on patrol officers for a shift, the watch would be supplemented by the traffic unit, crime reduction team members, and youth officers to assist in the responding to the volume of calls for service.

### LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE

To ensure that all participants had a common understanding of what a lower priority call for service was for this study, each participant was informed that lower priority calls were those calls for service that did not require a police officer to attend immediately. Participants were told that, for the most part, Priority 3 and 4 calls were considered lower priority calls in this study. For clarification, the examples of nuisance calls, theft from autos with no suspect at scene, and property crimes where there was no suspect at scene and no evidence to collect were provided to each participant. At that point, participants were asked if there were other types of calls for service or definitions that were being used by their police agency that did not fit into this conceptualization of a lower priority call for service. While all participants agreed that a call for service that did not require an officer to attend immediately was generally considered a lower priority call by their police agency, and that they agreed that Priority 3 and 4 calls were how they and their police agency thought of lower priority, some participants provided additional context to how calls for service were thought of. It was interesting to note that some of the ways lower priority calls for service were thought of had to do with the number of officers typically available to respond to calls

on a shift, the volume of calls for service during a typical shift, and the real or perceived expectations of the public, which differed across communities.

Some participants indicated that their police agency did not really think about calls for service in priority terms. In other words, they would respond because they typically had enough members available to respond to the volume of calls for service in a typical shift, and there was a public expectation that when a member of the public called the police, an officer would attend the scene. In other words, the nature of the call or its seriousness determined the level of response, rather than whether the police would attend. Other participants highlighted the public expectation aspect of calls for service. For example, if there were no safety issues related to the call, there was no suspect at the scene, or there was not a risk of evidence being destroyed or lost, dispatchers and officers would classify this type of call as a lower priority. However, participants indicated that there were, at times, a disconnect between how the police evaluated the priority of the call for service and the public's perception. Examples of these types of calls for service were those related to youth and the homeless where the subject of the complaint was not doing anything illegal, but a member of the public wanted the police to engage with the person. Participants reported that there were many types of calls for service that the police should not or did not need to attend, but the public expected the police to respond in a timely manner and resolve the issue, despite their inability to address social issues.

The general sentiment was that there was consistency across the various police agencies that participated in this study about what constituted a lower priority call for service. What changed definitionally and operationally was the nature of the respond to these types of calls based on the number of officers available to respond, the volume of calls for service at any given time, and the general expectations of the public. While some police agencies were, in practice, a 'no call too small' organisation, others have accepted the reality that while ideally every call for service would result in a police officer attending the scene or meeting face-to-face with the complainant, this was simply not possible given the volume of calls for service and the nature of those calls (i.e., mental health related calls or bylaw infractions). Moreover, there were those police agencies that recognized that there were all kinds of calls for service that would result in an officer attending in another jurisdiction but given the high volume of Priority 1 and 2 calls for service in their jurisdiction, there were simply entire categories of calls for service that their officers could not and would not attend in person. Again, this is not to say that those types of calls for service were not viewed as important by the police or that there would not be a benefit to the community and a general increase in the sense of safety associated with having a police officer attend, but that there were simply not enough officers and not enough time for the police to attend to all calls in person. Therefore, lower priority calls for service did not always result in a police officer attending the scene in some police agencies. In fact, there were some police agencies that did not attend any Priority 4 calls for service in person in the first instance. In this way, **each police agency developed their own Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to respond to calls for service that aligned with the nature and quantity of calls for service, as well as public expectations.** As a result, for the most part, while there was no discrepancy in whether a call for service was defined as a lower priority call for service, what was different was the way different police agencies responded to that type of call. Some participants indicated that their patrol officers would attend to a particular type of call, others

indicated that their officers would only attend if or when they had the time, while others indicated that they would rarely if ever attend that type of call.

As mentioned above, in the Lower Mainland, between 2018 and 2020, 61.8% of all calls for service were Priority 3 and 4. As this aggregate finding does not speak to the specific proportion of lower priority calls for service in a particular detachment or department in the Lower Mainland, participants were asked what the proportion of lower priority calls for service was typically in their police agency. Of those participants who stated that they could provide a relatively accurate estimate, the range was from 50% to 80% with most participants indicating that it was likely around 70% of all calls for service to their police agency. While it was interesting that the proportions provided by participants was close to the three-year aggregate presented above, it was also interesting to note that the reported proportions did not really vary by police agency size. Instead, the major difference appeared to be with the volume of calls for service rather than the distribution of calls for service by priority level. While one might argue that larger police agencies had more calls for service but also had more officers available to respond to calls for service, which should, therefore, account for this greater volume allowing all police agencies to have the same SOPs for responding to calls for service, this does not account for differences in community expectations, nor the fact that Priority 1 and 2 calls for service take a considerable amount of time and resources to clear, which, for a variety of reasons to be discussed below, is also becoming more true for Priority 3 and 4 calls for service. In other words, a police agency with 10% more Priority 1 and 2 calls for service may not be able to provide the same degree of response to all calls for service by simply having 10% more officers per shift.

In terms of the processes used to define lower priority calls for service in each participating police agency, there were two main ways. For those departments or detachments that employed E-Comm for dispatch, there was a standard definition and coding system for what types of calls for service received what initial priority level from the dispatchers. Still, many participants indicated that supervisors or watch commanders had the authority to override the initial priority level assigned by the E-Comm dispatcher, although participants indicated that this rarely happened. Some examples of when this had occurred included calls for shoplifting where the suspect had become verbally aggressive, and dispatch might categorise the call as a robbery rather than shoplifting or an argument between a parent and their child that was categorised as intimate partner violence. In general, the overriding of E-Comm's priority classification occurred in situations where the offence type was not particularly serious, but the issue was a growing concern for the public. In these types of cases, while the priority level may not officially change in the CAD system, the supervisor or watch commander might override the priority level of the call resulting in an increase in the level or timeliness of the response.

It should also be noted that participants from policing agencies that contracted the services of E-Comm spoke very highly of their accuracy in setting the priority level of most calls for service, for the most part. The other three main issues that were most commonly reported by participants as reasons for changing the priority level of a call for service from the level assigned by E-Comm were instances where the suspect was still on-scene, where the supervisor or watch commander believed that there was a good chance to collect perishable evidence, such as fingerprints from a property offence, or situations where E-Comm would write off the call, but the call was something of

importance to the community or something the police wanted to attend. For example, someone might call 9-1-1 because they see an erratic driver. E-Comm might reach out to the police agency and ask if they wanted to be dispatched or strike the file because the vehicle was headed out of the police agency's jurisdiction, or the complainant no longer had visual contact with the vehicle. Similarly, there might be some types of calls for service that were becoming part of a police agency's online reporting system that E-Comm wrote off in the past, simply generating a file number, rather than referring the caller to the online reporting system, which will be discussed in greater detail below. One example of this provided by several participants was related to theft from autos. In this case, the caller required a police file number for insurance purposes and E-Comm would not forward that call to the police for a response. However, several participants spoke of the value in attending these types of calls, especially if there was an increase in thefts from autos in a particular location, if there was CCTV available, or if there was the possibility of obtaining fingerprints or other forensic evidence.

Some police agencies had their own internal Operational Communication Centre (OCC) to dispatch calls for service. While there are significant financial and other resource costs associated with establishing and maintaining an OCC, one of its benefits, from the perspective of participants, was that it allowed for the establishment of flexible SOPs that reflected the capacities and needs of the police agency and the community it served, rather than a more universal approach that was workable for a broad range of police agencies and more difficult to change. In effect, the cost savings that derived from a standardized model like E-Comm may come at the expense of a custom approach that might better serve the needs of a particular policing agency. **The ability to have a watch commander or supervisor, as well as other police officers in the OCC or radio room, such as a dedicated radio room constable, to triage calls for service as they came in and to assist civilian dispatchers to better understand a call for service could contribute to officers being dispatched in ways that aligned more closely with community and police priorities, as well as police resources and experience.** As will be discussed in the recommendation section of this report, which there is a duty commander position at E-Comm, this officer rarely has the time to address the triaging of calls. Having others in the OCC or radio room with the responsibility of assisting dispatch triage calls for service also provides for greater flexibility in modifying response approaches in real time as local crime trends emerged and changed, community expectations shifted, and when there were alterations or adjustments in police priorities and resources. It should be noted that participants from police agencies with their own OCC reported that, for the most part, the guidelines and definitions used by E-Comm to classify and categorize calls for service were being used by them as well. It is also important to recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic forced police agencies to alter some of their SOPs when it came to responding to calls for service to minimize contact between the public and the police and to maintain social distancing regulations. As such, the recommendation section of this report will speak to some of the lessons learned in responding to calls for service because of COVID-19.

## **PARTICIPANTS' VIEW OF THE CHANGING NATURE OF LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

When discussing the changing nature of calls for service, several themes emerged. The first theme, which was mentioned by all participants, was the increased number of calls for service where the

primary or driving factor was mental health, addiction, and/or homelessness related. Examples were offered of situations where the police would receive numerous calls for service regarding a specific individual wandering around an affluent neighborhood. Anecdotally, participants noted that there were individuals in the community about whom the police are called daily, but there were no safety concerns and no criminal code offences to investigate, just numerous files being created because the homeless or youth were often perceived as being a nuisance to some people in the community. Participants noted that the perception from the public was that homelessness, addiction, and mental health were serious issues that the police should respond to and resolve. The challenge was that, despite social issues related to addiction and homelessness, the individual was often not doing anything wrong, was not causing a disturbance, and was otherwise within their lawful rights to be there. Therefore, having police respond to these calls was often an ineffective use of police resources. Moreover, while participants felt that the public would like the police to remove or displace the homeless, there was nowhere for them to go given the dearth of social housing. As such, there was little that the police could do. Participants noted that these types of issues were an example of the growing challenge between what the public expected the police to do and what the police were lawfully able to do or were properly resourced and trained to do. Several participants noted that the number of mental health related calls for service continued to increase year over year, and the police were consistently challenged in their capacity to respond, often questioning whether they were the appropriate organisation to respond. Anecdotally, participants reported that early in their careers, they would attend perhaps one or two mental health calls for service per month, but they were typically responding to four to six mental health-related calls for service each shift.

Some policing organisations reported success in the development of multi-agency partnerships, including with mental health, addictions, BC Housing, Fraser Health, and bylaw with an aim to effectively address the chronic social issues that resulted in numerous calls for service related to a specific individual in the community over time. There were many differing iterations of this from the creation of situation tables to the implementation of multi-officer support units to the identification of individual officers whose primary role was to focus on vulnerable persons. Some participants noted that their policing agencies had developed or participated in homeless outreach teams that sought to house individuals who were repeatedly the subject of complaint in lower priority calls for service. In a few communities, there existed a dedicated mental health or vulnerable persons officer who would provide a cell phone number to the various organisations and agencies that repeatedly called for service. The intent was that the organisation would call the officer directly, avoiding the call board and ensuring that the receiving police officer was well versed in the *Mental Health Act*. In every community that had this model, participants suggested it was proving effective in reducing calls for service for general duty; however, this could not be independently validated by the authors of this report.

In terms of innovative responses to lower priority calls for service, one participant noted that they have heard of a program in which the crime analysts provided a monthly target list with the top five individuals generating calls for service because of chronic social issues. This program stemmed from the philosophy of the Priority Target Enforcement Program (PTEP) already in place for prolific offenders, but rather than 'targeting' these individuals, the intent was to facilitate dialogue

to identify the risk factors and needs of the individual for the purposes of referring them to the necessary and appropriate community resources, including finding them housing whenever possible. All participants offered positive views of the police mental health car program (i.e., Car 67, Car 87, Car 80) and suggested that communities across the Lower Mainland would benefit from the more widespread implementation of this type of program given the ever-increasing volume of calls for service related to individuals in crisis with concomitant issues stemming from mental health and addictions.

In considering the process of responding to mental health calls for service, participants suggested that the provision of a police escort to mental health wards was often a resource intensive and time-consuming venture. As an example, one participant from a medium sized police agency noted that their analysts had tracked the amount of time spent on Section 28 *Mental Health Act* apprehensions and found the average wait for two police officers at the hospital was 120 minutes. Anecdotally, participants reported doing approximately three hours of paperwork related to the individual and the incident, and commonly discovering that the individual had been released from the hospital before their paperwork was even completed. Other participants reported that there were evening shifts where mental health-related calls for service dominated the call board, with one participant reporting 23 Section 28 *Mental Health Act* apprehensions during a single shift. Another participant explained that hundreds of calls for service came in annually related to less than 12 individuals who were homeless and experiencing severe addiction in the community. Another participant noted that there was one young man in his community that was the subject of a complaint to police every single day, sometimes more than once. Other participants reported spending three hours doing paperwork related to a Section 28 *Mental Health Act* apprehension, and that the individual related to that file was the subject of 15 apprehensions in a 30-day period, and every time was released back into the community. Participants spoke of their frustration that a considerable amount of police resources were being spent on files that were non-criminal and, by and large, participants perceived that the police were not the appropriate agency to respond, unless there was violence, threat of violence, or threat of self-harm.

Across all participating police agencies, participants suggested that the availability of a mental health nurse to respond to calls for service with a police officer (e.g., Car 67, 80, 87) offered a significant improvement in service, noting that mental health nurses were the qualified medical professionals with the training and skills to appropriately respond to individuals in crisis. Participants noted that because they were responding to a crisis situation, the police would still be required to attend to provide support if and when required. It was frequently iterated by participants that police officers were not the best or most qualified person to be providing a response to someone in a mental health crisis. Participants also suggested that there ought to be a broader conversation about whether police should respond to these types of calls for service and, if not, who should. Participants noted that the increased number of mental health files police officers were dealing with daily resulted in an overall decrease in officer morale and low occupational satisfaction.

All participants noted that addiction was a serious social issue in the Lower Mainland. Several participants noted that, in the past, the police were called to attend the many daily overdoses that were occurring. In 2017, the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* came into effect that protected

individuals who called for assistance in emergency overdose situations from charges of possession of a controlled substance under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*. Since then, local SOP's have been developed that delegated fire and ambulance as the primary responders to overdose calls for service, with police only attending at the request of these agencies. It was noted that this strategy significantly reduced those types of calls for service that police attended.

Also related to addictions and mental health were the increasing number of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) calls for service. Participants expressed concern that IPV had become rampant, but because it was an offence that was not visible to everyone, it was not receiving the necessary attention in prevention and intervention. Moreover, there was concern expressed that the reporting of IPV incidents to police was dropping year over year, even though the actual number of incidents was likely increasing. It was suggested that early interventions, if made available, might have a positive effect in reducing the number of serious IPV calls for service, where the incidents escalated to physical violence before police became involved.

Finally, participants noted that there has been a shift over time in the volatility inherent in responding to lower priority calls for service, suggesting that very mundane calls that were initially coded as Priority 3 or 4 could quickly escalate to use of force situations, which was attributed to the increase in calls for service that involved a subject who was suffering from addictions or a mental health issue. As such, participants frequently stated that no matter how mundane a call for service may initially seem, all calls should be treated as having the potential for officer and public risk. In effect, understanding the potential of any lower priority call for service to escalate, especially given the rates of mental health issues and addiction, should be at the forefront of decision-making in developing policy related to the ways police organisations respond to lower priority calls for service.

## **RESPONDING TO LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

In broad terms, there were four main ways that the participating agencies responded to lower priority calls for service. These four ways were dispatching one or more officers to the call, calling the complainant back to discuss the situation, using an online reporting system for certain types of issues, and writing the call for service off in the CAD with no contact or follow-up with the complainant. Given that participants in this study came from many different municipal police departments and RCMP detachments, there was a great deal of variability in how each of these four respond approaches manifested in practice. For example, some participants came from policing agencies in which at least one police officer would attend every call for service while others came from agencies in which no Priority 4 calls for service were attended by a police officer. As a result, this section of the report will discuss the various approaches used for each response approach to provide an overview of the various options that police leaders could consider in determining what might work best of their police agency.

Again, in general terms, when a call for service was received either by E-Comm or a police agency's own OCC, it was assigned a priority level. Other requests for police services could be received through an online reporting system, or by a member of the public presenting themselves at the police station or a community police station. For those calls for service that were received by calling

the emergency or non-emergency phone numbers, when they were assigned a priority level, they might be triaged in the radio room to determine if a police officer should attend the scene or whether the call for service could be addressed in some other way. According to most participants, the decision of whether an officer must be dispatched to a lower priority call for service was based on whether there was a suspect still at scene, there was a good chance that perishable evidence could be obtained, there was video evidence that could be secured, or there was a safety issue that required the police to attend. Of course, this type of call triage did not occur in those police agencies that adopted and operated under a 'no call too small' approach. For these police agencies, at least one police officer was dispatched to respond to all lower priority calls for service, regardless of whether the nature of the call for service demanded the presence of a police officer.

Police officers were dispatched to calls based on the priority level assigned to the call. Given this, lower priority calls for service were dispatched when all Priority 1 and 2 calls for service had been responded to. As a result, it was possible that lower priority calls for service remained in the dispatch queue for many hours. Participants spoke of several different practices for addressing calls remaining in the dispatch queue for long periods of time. For example, some participants indicated that if a lower priority call for service had been in the dispatch queue for over four hours, a supervisor would call the complainant to determine whether the issue persisted, and they still needed assistance. Participants spoke of calls related to noise complaints, for example, as a call type where a supervisor would call the complainant after several hours if the call was still in the queue, to apologize for the delay in responding, explain why the police had still not responded, and to ask if the caller still wanted or needed the police to attend. Moreover, several RCMP participants indicated that if a file had been in the queue for more than four hours, the Watch Commander had to add a comment to the file explaining the rationale for the time delay.

### **Sending a Police Officer to Respond to a Lower Priority Call for Service**

Given the different police agencies that participants worked in, some participants indicated that they sent at least one police officer to every call for service. However, even when this was not possible given the volume of calls for service and the number of police officers on a shift, some participants indicated that if a complainant called several times about the same issue and was very upset, even for a lower priority issue from the perspective of the police, they would dispatch an officer. This occurred because, as most participants reported, their police agency was very client-centred and that even a minor issue that might take an officer five to 30 minutes to resolve made the complainant feel better and could enhance the public's view of the police. Still, participants felt that it was very inefficient to have police officers spend a lot of their time traveling to lower priority calls for service and dealing with issues that were not, in their minds, policing matters. Moreover, some participants worked in police agencies that were responsible for very large geographic areas with a small number of officers per shift available to respond to calls for service. In these circumstances, police officers spent a lot of time in their vehicles driving from call to call. **When these calls were of a lower priority, where there was no evidence to collect, no suspect at the scene, or no immediate threat to safety, it may be expedient to use other methods to address these types of calls for service that still satisfy the complainant, the public, and maintain public safety.** Furthermore, given budgetary constraints and the current environment in some



communities regarding attitudes towards and trust in the police, the solution to responding more often and in a more reasonable amount of time to lower priority calls for service cannot simply be to add more patrol officers.

It should be noted that most participants stated that public perception of a responsive police agency that responded to and interacted with the community was extremely important, perhaps more so than in the past. Given this, **whenever possible, sending a police officer to speak and interact with a complainant, even if the officer was not going to be able to do anything about the issue, was viewed as an important part of building and maintaining trust and a positive relationship with the community.** Many participants indicated that the most common complaint they received from the public was that someone called the police and the police never showed up and no one called them back. Regardless of the number of calls for service, this kind of situation can be mitigated, as will be discussed in the recommendations section of this report. It should also be noted that, as will be discussed below, younger people might be much more comfortable interacting with the police over the phone, texting, or in an online environment, while older people may be more comfortable and desire a face-to-face interaction with a police officer. In this way, **responding in person might not always be the preferred method of interacting from the perspective of the complainant or the police.**

For some participants, sending a police officer to every call for service was also viewed from within the context of community expectations. Regardless of the size of the police agency, the historical relationship between various segments of the community and the police, or the number of calls for service, participants understood that, in general, people wanted to feel that they had been heard, that their issues were being taken seriously by the police, and that someone was working at solving their concerns. In this way, while having a police officer attend every call might be financially and operationally impractical, there was an awareness that, in some communities, this was the expectation, either because of past practice or a public commitment by police leaders or community leaders. Many participants spoke of the psychological challenges facing members of the public when police agencies no longer attended lower priority calls for service in person, but instead relied on automated systems or phone calls. While these approaches can be done successfully, **police agencies need to communicate extremely clearly to the community the reasons why their officers no longer or do not attend certain calls for service.** In effect, there needs to be a clearly defined match between what the police can and will deliver and what the community expects of their police.

As mentioned above, **phoning the complainant back to explain why an officer had not yet attended or that an officer would not attend and having an online reporting system are two ways to address the inability to send an officer to every lower priority call for service.** Some participants also mentioned that there were a proportion of officers who simply did not want to attend lower priority calls for service. These officers felt that lower priority calls were a waste of time, were uninteresting, were not solvable, were not the responsibility of police, did not result in charges, and were not related to what the officer wanted to do or why they joined the police in the first place. While it is somewhat understandable that most people who join a police agency do not do so to deal with noise complaints, graffiti, or minor property theft, **it is important for police leaders to stress the value of interacting with the public, resolving issues that are of concern**

**to the public, regardless of their priority level, and recognizing that what might seem to be a minor issue to the police officer might be the worst thing that had ever happened to the complainant.** Moreover, responding appropriately, whatever that means for the complainant, was critical to establishing trust with the police and a sense of public safety. Again, this does not mean that police must respond to all lower priority calls for service in person but deciding to not attend certain types of calls simply because police officers did not enjoy these types of calls, did not find them exciting, or did not see the point of attending was not a good way to maintain the trust and confidence of the public. Conversely, while new patrol officers might not see this right away, the experience of going to lower priority calls was very important for an officer because it provided them with opportunities to engage with the public and talk through issues of concern, building communication skills. In effect, at times, lower priority calls for service provided officers opportunities to interact with the public in less stressful situations and enhanced their connections to the community.

Moreover, some participants acknowledged that there was often only limited information about the incident provided through a dispatcher, so the police officer had an opportunity to gather more information by attending the scene and talking to the complainant directly. In addition, while the priority level of a call for service may be reduced once an officer attended the scene and evaluated the situation, or the classification of the incident may change to a less serious offence or incident after the police attended, it was also possible that a less serious call for service, such as a loud party, could escalate into something much more serious if the police did not attend the scene. In this way, **there was a value in police attending a call for service that was originally classified as a lower priority when possible.** One example of this type of incident is a heated argument between partners as police capturing some of the information related to what happened and whether the argument was part of a pattern would be relevant in establishing whether there was an escalating risk for IPV.

Participants were very clear that sending a member to a call for service, even a lower priority call, was a successful and beneficial technique. Of note, success was not always defined by participants as obtaining sufficient evidence for Crown Counsel to lay a charge and successfully prosecute a suspect. Instead, for many participants, having an officer attend the scene resulted in the police interacting with the public, getting a more fulsome understanding of the issue or incident, and being more engaged with the public. Participants argued that policing was driven by communication, personal interaction, and empathy. In sum, a general theme from participants was that, **even though attending every call for service was impractical for most police agencies, this was still considered best practice and the most beneficial approach.** However, a consistent challenge was managing the volume of calls for service and the expectations of the complainant in terms of how long it might take for an officer to arrive on scene and what the police officer might do when on scene in relation to a lower priority call for service. In effect, when it came to lower priority calls for service, for the most part, especially in larger police agencies, the determining factor in whether the police dispatched an officer to the scene or just called the complainant to resolve the issue was if the police felt that there was a reasonable opportunity to collect video or some other form of evidence. In the absence of that, a large proportion of lower priority calls for

service were dealt with over the phone, which as will be discussed below, was viewed as efficient and an excellent way to address a large proportion of lower priority calls for service.

### Phoning the Complainant for Lower Priority Calls for Service in the Dispatch Queue

Given the volume of calls for service that a police agency routinely received, it was simply not possible, without adding additional frontline officers, for many police agencies to respond in person and in an appropriate amount of time to all lower priority calls for service. As mentioned above, some participants reported that lower priority calls for service could remain in the dispatch queue for six hours or more, depending on how busy the police were during that shift. Moreover, some participants indicated that some lower priority calls for service could remain in the dispatch queue for up to 24 hours and be handed off from watch to watch. One way to address this commonly reported situation of either having too many calls in the queue or having calls in the queue remain there for a very long a period of time was to have someone phone the complainant back to determine if an officer was still needed to attend the scene, to attempt to resolve the matter over the phone, or to book an appointment for an officer to meet the complainant at an agreed upon time. Given the comments from participants, there was not a standardized system in place for how to do this across different police agencies or even across watches within the same police agency.

#### **One approach to address the challenge of too many calls in the queue or calls remaining in the queue for an extended amount of time was to have some form of telephone response.**

Participants identified having some sort of system whereby a police officer could call back the complainant of a lower priority call for service as very efficient in that it eliminated the call from the queue, allowed the police agency to better triage the call for service, frequently avoided the need for a police officer to drive to the location, which saved time and resources, allowed the complainant the opportunity to let the police know that the matter had been resolved, and/or improved police-community relationships because the call for service was either resolved or the complainant felt that they were heard and that the police took time to interact with them, even if it was over the phone, through text, or video conferencing, and not in person. To this final point, many participants spoke about how younger people were much more comfortable talking with an officer over the phone, using some type of messaging or text application on their phone, or interacting through email rather than talking to the police face-to-face. In effect, younger people were viewed as being very comfortable with technology and preferred this way of interacting with the police, when appropriate. In this way, this approach to responding to a lower priority call for service, depending on the nature of the call, might be preferential to a large portion of the community, especially if the alternative was writing the call off in the CAD.

A phone call also provided an opportunity for a supervisor to triage a lower priority call for service prior to sending an officer to attend the scene. **This opportunity should be used to gauge the nature of the call and assess the most appropriate response.** In effect, when used, participants viewed checking in with the complainant as assisting in delivering the best possible service, provided an opportunity for the watch commander or supervisor to ask probing questions to properly triage the call for service, and increased the satisfaction of the complainant as they were not waiting for a police officer to attend with no update or feedback from the police. It also

provided an opportunity for the police to explain either the delay in their response or the reasons why the police would not be attending the scene in person.

Participants provided a range of examples in which phoning the complainant back was an efficient way to deal with all kinds of lower priority calls for service. One example provided was for traffic offences in which a vehicle description was provided but not a licence plate. Rather than writing that type of call off in the CAD or the call queue, **calling the complainant back to thank them for the information and providing the complainant with an opportunity to speak with a police officer was considered very valuable in making the complainant feel heard and that their concerns were valid and reasonable.** Some participants even felt that this positive interaction, even though it might be very brief, might make a complainant more likely to call the police again in the future and improve the complainant's view of the police. In addition, as will be discussed in the recommendations section of this report, some participants indicated that the responsibility of calling back lower priority calls for service complainants could be given to frontline officers when they had a chance to do so, or this responsibility could be given to light duty officers, those on modified duty, or those under a Duty to Accommodate policy. In effect, this frees up frontline officers to respond to more serious calls for service and provides accommodated officers a valuable responsibility. However, as mentioned above, calling or texting complainants back should not become the standard procedure for all lower priority calls for service because of the value in face-to-face interactions, the experiences that junior officers gain from dealing in person with the public in a policing context, and the investigative benefits of attending the scene. In those cases where the telephone response officer determined that further investigation was required, they could inform a supervisor or watch commander so that the call for service could be assigned to a member on the road.

In those circumstances in which calling the complainant back did not resolve the issue and an officer was needed to attend the scene, as lower priority calls for service do not require an officer to attend immediately, setting up an appointment with the complainant was also viewed as very effective and efficient. Many participants indicated that, in their experience, complainants were typically happier setting up an appointment that was convenient for them as this meant that the complainant did not have to wait around for an officer to eventually show up, which was more desirable for all parties.

Participants from larger police agencies reported that they could **assign a few officers from each shift or those on modified duty to just attend appointments that were typically associated with collecting non-perishable evidence**, such as video evidence from a business, residence, vehicle dashboard camera, or a doorbell camera. Participants reported that simply from a customer service perspective, **setting a time and place that an officer would come to collect evidence and speak to the complainant was perceived as being very valuable to the complainant**, in addition to being very efficient from a policing perspective. In fact, some participants, particularly from larger policing agencies, reported that this approach substantially reduced the number of lower priority calls for service that remained in the dispatch queue for a long time or were simply written off in the CAD.

Still, some participants indicated that their police agency did not call back complainants, even for lower priority calls that have been in the dispatch queue for a long period of time. Others indicated that phoning the complainant was never the first response, especially pre-COVID-19. Of note, participants stated that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many police agencies increased the types of calls that would be responded to in the first instance by a phone call rather than by dispatching an officer to the scene. These participants reported that there had not been any pushback from the community to this approach in responding to calls. Moreover, participants felt that this approach was very efficient and were interested in seeing this approach continued post-COVID-19. In larger police agencies, phoning the complainant back was a typical way of dealing with lower priority calls for service. Some participants also reported that for specific types of calls for service, the complainant could email their statement to the police. Still, from the perspective of participants, calling back complainants to inform them of the status of their call for service, to resolve the issue and close the file, or to book an appointment to have an officer meet with the complainant was viewed as an effective and efficient way to respond to lower priority calls for service.

### Online Reporting for Lower Priority Calls for Service

As discussed in the literature review, typically, online reporting of lower priority calls for service occurs in one of two ways. The first way involves the complainant logging into the online reporting website, answering a few screening questions to determine whether their issue meets the approved incident types for online reporting, and then filling out the information related to the issue. If their issue does not meet the necessary criteria, the complainant is advised to call the non-emergency phone number for assistance. The second way is for the complainant to call either the emergency or non-emergency phone line and, after discussing the issue with a dispatcher or while being 'on hold' for the next available dispatcher, being informed about or referred to the online reporting system. At the time of the writing of this report, all RCMP detachments in the Lower Mainland District and several municipal police departments had an online reporting system available to the public. RCMP detachments were using a model and system developed by RCMP 'E' Division, while municipal police departments have developed their own criteria for online reporting. For the RCMP, at the time of writing this report, the types of calls for service that are eligible for online reporting were:

- Mischief to Property Under \$5,000.00
- Mischief to Motor Vehicle Under \$5,000.00
- Hit & Run to Unoccupied Vehicle or Property
- Theft of Bicycle Under \$5,000.00
- Theft Under \$5,000.00
- Theft from Motor Vehicle Under \$5,000.00
- Lost Property
- Lost or Stolen License Plate or Decal

At the time of the interviews with participants, their respective police agencies were at different stages of implementing or using online reporting. Still, there were several common themes that emerged about the uptake, use, value, challenges, and outcomes of online reporting.

All participants indicated that online reporting was used primarily for incidents in which there was no suspect, no evidence, no immediate safety concerns, and where no physical harm had occurred. Many reported that their police agency used social media, traditional media, and their website to promote their online reporting system and to educate the public about the types of incidents that were appropriate for online reporting. Again, while there was consistency in the criteria for RCMP detachments, municipal police departments determined for themselves the types of incidents that would be eligible for online reporting. Still, there was a large degree of overlap in the types of incidents that were accepted for online reporting among police agencies in British Columbia.

Participants felt that incidents in which a complainant was principally interested in obtaining a police file number for insurance purposes was an excellent use of online reporting because it saved police officers a lot of time. Still, many participants expressed concern that incidents reported through the online reporting system might not be reviewed for 12 to 24 hours. There were a few issues with this from the perspective of participants. To begin, participants were concerned that there might be incidents reported using online reporting that should have had a police officer attend. For example, one participant recounted that a complainant reported being assaulted by their spouse who also destroyed their phone so that the victim could not report the incident to the police. In this case, the victim used the online reporting system, but the incident was not reviewed by a police officer until 16 hours after it was reported. Given this, a concern from participants was that incidents that posed a real safety issue were being reported online for a variety of reasons but were resulting in too much time passing between when the incident was reported, when it was reviewed by a police officer, and when the police dispatched an officer in response to the incident. Related to this, some participants felt that important evidence might not be collected by the police that could be valuable in solving other, larger crimes. The example provided was incidents of theft from auto. When reported through the online system and when officers were not made aware of the incident, they naturally did not attend the scene. However, there might be video that recorded the incident that could assist in solving that crime and several others. In response to this type of concern, some participants indicated that they do dispatch officers whenever possible to lower priority incidents that have been reported online to determine whether there was any video or other evidence to collect or in response to a trend in lower priority crimes.

Participants also expressed the concern that, at times, the information was reported incorrectly or some of the information was missing with the online files, which resulted in the police spending a lot of time to follow up with and conclude the report. This led some participants to the conclusion that online reporting could create more work for officers compared to having the complainant speak with a dispatcher in the first instance. Of note, some participants believed that the implementation of the online reporting system was not specifically or exclusively designed to free up officers to respond to more serious calls for service. Some participants felt that, as mentioned above, online reporting helped the mobile phone generation report incidents and interact with the police in a way they were more comfortable with. In effect, online reporting was an outreach method for a particular segment of the population, namely younger people, that commonly have higher rates of victimisation than other age groups. Others believed that the online reporting system reduced wait times to file a report and reduced the number of people calling the non-emergency phone line. Moreover, it allowed people to report an incident to the police without

having to remain 'on hold' on the non-emergency line for an extended period of time. In other words, **online reporting, when done properly and with an emphasis on educating the public about its role, had the potential to address the kind of calls for service that a police officer was not required to engage in.** In effect, online reporting could provide a police file number satisfying the complainant without utilizing unnecessary police resources.

Most participants with knowledge of the online reporting system stated that online reporting only accounted for a very small proportion of their agency's incident reporting. In other words, this method of reporting incidents to the police was not frequently being used by the public. This might be the result of online reporting still being rolled out in some jurisdictions or being very new in others. In effect, for most police agencies, the use of online reporting has been very slow and somewhat underwhelming. Some participants indicated that complainants were using the online reporting system to bypass the emergency and non-emergency system or that people were providing information about incidents that should not be coming through the online system but were using the system to report an incident anonymously or not wanting to go through the Crime Stoppers system. Other participants stated that online reporting was important because it allowed those who were afraid or scared to speak with a police officer to report an incident. Of note, some participants indicated that when the online reporting system was used inappropriately, the report was simply written off with no further action taken by the police. However, it took a lot of work to remove an online report that should not have been reported that way.

### Writing Off Lower Priority Calls for Service in the CAD

While participants indicated that they did not like to write off any calls for service in the CAD, the volume of calls, the nature of some of calls, or the amount of time that had passed since the call was received, at times, necessitated this type of response. Several participants emphasized the importance of listening to the public and, as such, have put measures in place to demonstrate to the public that the police are listening and responsive to their needs and concerns. To this end, many participants reported that they had strict criteria for which calls for service could be written off in the CAD. Examples provided by participants were driving complaints, such as a suspected impaired driver that could not be located or complainants only being able to provide a partial license plate. Other types of calls included a suspicious person that could not be located by the police or a false alarm. Of note, many of these types of calls resulted in a police officer being dispatched, but the call for service was ultimately written off. While this was one way to conclude the file, it did not necessarily result in a significant time saving for the police as they were still dispatched and, sometimes called the complainant back to provide an update on their complaint. A few participants indicated that, at times, lower priority calls for service were written off in the CAD because the shift was ending or the watch was changing, and supervisors did not want to have calls in the queue when a shift change occurred. Alternatively, the incoming supervisor would attempt to clear the call for service queue of the previous shift by writing off the calls or phoning the complainant back.

## OTHER WAYS TO REDUCE OR RESPOND TO LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE

Participants reported several innovative responses to reduce the overall number of lower priority calls for service. Several officers noted that appropriate public education about when a call to 9-1-1 was necessary would be effective. This was done in the hopes that it would reduce calls for service that should be directed towards other agencies in the first instance. Several participants noted the strategic use of social media campaigns to inform and educate the public about the alternatives to calling 9-1-1, including calling the non-emergency number and broad dissemination of resources regarding other social service agencies had been effective in reducing the volume of calls for service. Participants noted that there were inherent resource challenges in every call received by E-Comm that did not actually result in a file because it was not a police matter. In sum, officers suggested that by effectively reducing the number of non-police matter calls received at E-comm, the effect would be less wait time on hold and more efficient use of E-Comm and police resources.

To that end, numerous police organisations have recently hired civilian communications and media coordinators dedicated to providing educational information across numerous platforms, including through pamphlets and flyers in several languages, direct mailouts, particularly to older community members who were less connected with technology, and through social media, including Instagram, Facebook, twitter, and reddit. Some participants noted that social media was effectively utilized to educate the public through consistent posts and videos about the empowering choices citizens could make in crime prevention. Some posts were meant to remind citizens to lock the doors of their vehicles and residences at a certain time, others offered tips to help individuals avoid being the victim of theft from auto. It was noted that with any crime prevention activities, there was no internal capacity to empirically measure outcomes, but officers often felt that the public was engaging with the police on issues related to crime prevention through social media, and that was perceived as a success.

Participants from all the police agencies in this study reported the use of crime prevention programs intended to reduce calls for service. In some communities, the bulk of crime prevention work was done by volunteers, whereas in other jurisdictions, there were dedicated police officers in crime prevention roles. It was suggested that the role of those officers was to reduce calls for general duty policing and, as such, that officers should provide citizens that they engage with direct contact information to themselves and the social services organisations in the community to reduce calls to 9-1-1. If something could be handled without generating a file for a patrol officer, that officer could make an appointment to meet with the complainant or a concerned member of the public. Several participants noted that, because of resource constraints, their organisation had reduced the number of dedicated crime prevention officers, but also noted that **civilian staff were being trained in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to re-allocate some of the lower priority files**. Given the differential pay between civilian and sworn, this seemed, on the face of it, to be a worthwhile task reallocation.

In every community, participants reported that police organisations maintained community policing strategies, including giving away free bike locks, having volunteers put cards on vehicle windshields, and encouraging citizens not to leave visible items in their vehicles to prevent theft from auto. One innovative idea involved a commercial anti-theft strategy that involved an unremovable property identification sticker. Other prevention programs included bait mail for mail



theft and bait bikes for bike theft. The benefits of these programs, as it related to lower priority calls for service, were perceived as two-fold. First, it was believed that these programs deterred and reduced crime. The second benefit was that these programs engaged volunteers, strengthened community relationships and trust in police, and reduced calls for service.

Despite the benefits of these programs, some participants expressed concerns that programs, such as citizens on patrol and civilian community crime watch, might actually increase calls for service because the role of these groups was to find things that created calls for service. As such, there were concerns expressed about resourcing because each volunteer required recruitment, training, and oversight, and then when a call for service was created through patrol or crime watch, another general duty member was required to respond. Moreover, in some police agencies, there were concerns that the police officers supervising volunteer programs were spending more time managing those programs than volunteer hours being worked. **It is important that relevant data and metrics are recorded to ensure that these programs offer a valuable return on investment, regardless of how that return on investment is defined for that police agency.**

Several participants noted that their police agency had developed SOP's related to false alarms, and they perceived this as effective. In one police agency, analysts developed a Commercial False Alarm Reduction Protocol after considering the peak periods that false alarm calls were being received, the nature of the call, and the outcome of the file. It was found that most calls for service were received in the morning when employees were arriving at work to open the facility or in the evening as they were leaving. As a result of these findings, the SOP is that when there was an audible alarm to a commercial property between 06:00-22:00, it was the responsibility of the alarm company to contact the company's representative and determine whether police were required, and then to request the police to attend the scene. After 22:00, all alarm calls were attended by police. In another police agency, an SOP was developed that required the alarm to be verified as having broken glass or as a multi-zone alarm before members would attend. In most police jurisdictions, participants noted that the city or municipality would send invoices to homeowners or businesses following a second false alarm call to that location, and, in some jurisdictions, the fine progressively increased with the number of false alarm calls to that location. Participants reported that these programs had been very successful in reducing the resource drain of false alarm calls.

In many policing organisations, crime analysts identified hotspots for lower priority calls for service and then general duty members conducted directed patrols in those areas. Depending on the size of the police agency, these hotspots could be updated daily or weekly. Participants reported hotspot policing as being very effective with a notable reduction in all types of calls for service in those targeted geographic areas. Some participants indicated that patrol officers would park their vehicles in crime hotspots to complete their paperwork on the mobile data terminals (MDT's) that resulted in a prolonged police presence in the area, which they believed deterred crime, provided an opportunity for the police officer to respond to a call for service more quickly, and reduced crime.

One participant noted that a neighbouring community had developed a differential response to motor vehicle accidents (MVA). In the past, that police organisation attended all MVA's where damage was likely to be more than \$1,000.00. Under the new protocol, officers only attended the

scene if there were significant injuries or a fatality. As a part of this initiative, firefighters in that community were trained in traffic control and the fire department became the primary dispatch for MVA's, thereby significantly reducing the number of calls for service that police would attend, as only those MVA's where the fire department requested a police presence would be attended by police.

Another strategy that participants often said they considered successful was the development of formalised liaison roles assigning specific community agencies to interact with specific police officers. For example, in the absence of mental health car program, such as Car 67, an officer or set of officers would be assigned to liaise with the mental health supports and the hospital in the community. Conversely, an officer was assigned as the primary contact for park rangers and another officer was assigned to liaise with the jurisdiction's bylaw officers. The perceived benefits of this type of approach included a degree of consistency and familiarity that resulted in the development of a relationship between agencies that was possible when there was a single point of contact.

It was noted by participants that business cases were required to develop and implement new crime prevention programs. Participants from the RCMP suggested that one of the difficulties they experienced in developing new strategies was the limited availability of data with which to make the case for the new program. It was suggested by several participants that this was an area where municipal departments that have their own business intelligence units thrived. It was noted that real time data was very important to developing empirical and evidence-based response strategies, but also to be able to provide current and accurate data to mayor and council. **Business intelligence is very different than crime analysis and it was suggested that every policing organisation would benefit from a civilian in-house business intelligence analyst to provide the most accurate and timely reporting to senior management and the municipality that the police served.**

About reporting, several participants noted that there existed a dearth of data related to mental health calls with no way to extract the relevant data that outlined the number of calls for service that included a mental health component. To that end, participants noted that the VPD had implemented a data collection initiative that did not permit the file to be concluded without the officer identifying whether the call for service had a mental health component. Given the economics of policing, the capacity for police organisations to accurately enumerate the volume of mental health related calls makes such a program a worthwhile endeavour.

A few participants noted that, in recent years, their police agencies had implemented a daytime position known as the "station constable". While typically on light duties or accommodated, that officer was present and able to take appointments at the detachment and return phone calls related to lower priority calls. Participants suggested that by being physically present and able to respond to front counter questions or concerns, the station constable was able to mitigate the unnecessary creation of additional lower priority files by conversing with the complainant in the first instance. In another police agency, the role of "information officer" was created. These roles were filled by accommodated sworn police officers assigned to each shift. Their role was to conclude files by telephone and provide support and information to the front desk and watch commander as needed.

It was noted that having a dedicated member integrated as part of the watch was seen as important to the success of this role.

### **PARTICIPANTS' VIEW OF THE VALUE AND BENEFITS TO POLICE AGENCIES AND THE PUBLIC OF RESPONDING TO LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

For the most part, participants felt that the various ways that police agencies commonly responded to lower priority calls for service was effective, practical, and reflected the volume and nature of calls for service combined with community expectations. Participants believed that when an officer attended a call for service, they conducted a thorough investigation, even for lower priority calls for service. While potentially mundane, participants acknowledged that attending lower priority calls for service contributed to making better police officers. Interacting with the public, talking with them, and developing and practicing their interview and problem-solving skills were very important and lower priority calls for service provided opportunities to do this and develop other investigative skills in 'lower-stakes' situations.

Participants held the view that attending calls for service, whenever possible, was critical for other reasons as well. Some participants stated that many people were only ever going to call the police once or twice in their lives and how the police responded to them shaped their view of the police and their personal level of safety and security in their community. Moreover, **it was important for the public to feel that the police were committed to their safety and took their concerns seriously, even if the nature of the call for service, from a policing perspective, was a lower priority issue.** Participants were aware that most people did not understand or have a great understanding of the notion of lower priority crimes. It was also viewed as important that the police did not leave people with the impression that their victimisation, regardless of the nature of the victimisation, was not important to the police or worth their time and resources. Participants believed that, for the most part, in reference to lower priority calls for service, the complainant simply wanted to be heard and that people deserved to be heard. Participants believed that the public warranted, at least, that much from their police. In effect, attending lower priority calls for service provided another opportunity for the police to build trust with the public.

It should also be noted that some members of the public do not want a police officer to come to their home or to have a police car parked in front of their home. In this way, phoning a complainant about their call for service or having the online reporting system was a preferred method of police-citizen interaction for a lower priority call for service. Having a phone or online conversation with the complainant, in the first instance, allowed the officer to access and gauge the nature of the call for service and determine whether an officer was required to attend or what was the preferred method of interaction from the perspective of the complainant. In effect, participants indicated that each call for service was different or unique and, as a result, it was very difficult to effectively implement a system for lower priority calls for service in which all calls of a particular type received the same type of response. Rather than leaving it all up to officer discretion, the benefit of a phone call from an officer was that it allowed for each lower priority call for service to be assessed on its own merits and responded to in a way that reflected the information provided to the officer by the complainant and the desire of the complainant. Some participants believed that this was a

better approach than the police response being based on a policy guiding a dispatcher to assign a particular priority level that determined the police response or to decide where to place a lower priority call in the queue.

Participants acknowledged that lower priority calls for service often came from law-abiding citizens who trusted and respected the police. To that end, participants recognized that to the complainant, their call for service was a high priority and were either seeking assistance from the police or doing their civic duty to report an incident to the police. In both cases, it was understood by participants that it was important for the police to respect that. **Every call for service provided the police with the potential to have a positive interaction with the public**, and this is even more so with a lower priority call for service as the level of victimisation or harm was typically much less, as was the public's expectation that the police would resolve or solve the issue. In effect, how the police interacted with complainants of lower priority calls were important because, from the perspective of some participants, it was their experience that those complainants were typically the people who supported the police and showed their support for the police publicly. If this was the case, it did not make sense for the police to fail to provide service to those people. Again, while responding to lower priority calls for service might not be the reason why many people joined a police agency, doing so provided the police with opportunities to have positive community engagement. To summarize the general sentiment of many participants, **if the police responded to lower priority calls for service in a way that aligned with community expectations, the community would be much more likely to help and support the police when necessary.**

### **PARTICIPANTS' VIEW OF THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH HOW POLICE AGENCIES RESPOND TO LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

Several participants identified human resources as a significant challenge in responding to lower priority calls for service. As a result, police agencies were required to develop SOPs to decide which types of lower priority calls for service an officer would attend because there were not enough resources in most police agencies to send an officer to all calls for service. While there were not many concerns with senior management's or supervisor's decisions about which calls for service would and would not be attended to by a police officer in the first instance, participants reported that it was extremely important to continually educate the public about the realities of police resources, mandates, and priorities, but that this dialogue had to occur within the context of listening to, understanding, and trying to meet public expectations of the police, especially in the absence of adding additional police officers to patrol functions.

The notion of public expectations and education went beyond the general views that the public might hold about their police, reasonable police response times, and the kinds of issues that the police would respond to. Instead, participants indicated that the public received messages from a range of public safety stakeholders, community members, and the media about contacting the police if, for example, they saw something or someone suspicious. However, when the public then did call the police, the nature of the police response mattered. Participants were concerned that when the police did not respond to a call or did not create a file because of the lower priority nature of the call, this could challenge the public's perception and trust in the police and may result in

citizens questioning the value the police placed on issues of concern to the public. Participants were concerned that the quality of service that the public expected of their police was sometimes greater than the police could provide. With respect to lower priority calls for service, for larger police agencies, this took the form of having a member attend the scene. For all police agencies, this was reflected in the time it took to attend and investigate lower priority calls for service and the ability of the police to resolve the issue, either because of the lack of evidence or the ability to find the subject of complaint or the vehicle associated with the call.

In addition, especially for larger police agencies or in some communities, it is not uncommon for patrol officers to spend their entire shift going from call to call, often without a break. Participants were concerned that, if a large proportion of the calls that patrol officers responded to without a break were lower priority calls, this could result in a reduction in officer morale and officers questioning the value of their efforts as a police officer. This may be because a large proportion of lower priority calls for service were viewed as not being a matter for the police. So, some participants felt that it was challenging for supervisors and senior management to communicate the value and importance of lower priority calls for service to their officers. One example provided was sending patrol officers to tell youth to stop playing basketball on the street because a resident complained about the noise. Participants felt that asking police to respond to these types of calls for service ran contrary to the core policing function of the police and the reasons why most people joined the police. Therefore, participants indicated that **it was very important for police leaders to communicate with their officers the reasons why they are being tasked with responding to lower priority calls for service and the ways that doing so in a meaningful way contributes to the larger mission of the police and the relationship between the police and the communities they serve.**

Participants felt that one way to address the resourcing issue was to triage calls more effectively so that members were only sent to those lower priority calls for service that required an officer to attend. Some participants pointed to E-Comm as one area that posed a challenge in that dispatchers did not know the jurisdictions they were dispatching to or the officers that were being sent on calls. It was suggested that having an in-house call centre resulted in a much closer relationship between the dispatcher and the patrol officers and resulted in a dispatcher who had a much better understanding of the jurisdiction, its issues, and the ways the police agency operated, especially with respect to lower priority calls for service. For example, an in-house dispatcher might be in a better position to explain to a complainant the amount of time it might take for an officer to connect with them, the method of contact, and the reasons for that type of response because they had specific knowledge of that police agency's SOPs and what was happening in the jurisdiction at that time. It might also help dispatchers classify call types more appropriately because they were more in tune with community standards, police priorities, and emerging crime trends. Still, regardless of whether the dispatcher was in-house or in a centralized location that served various police agencies, it was generally felt that **good dispatchers could help the complainant in their time of crisis.** Nonetheless, while this was not limited to in-house dispatchers, **the knowledge and experience of an in-house dispatcher increased the chances of providing more accurate and informed information.**

In terms of the nature of the response, triaging calls for service was viewed as critical for an effective, efficient, and appropriate response to lower priority calls for service. Moreover, participants indicated that triaging was important to ensure that the complainant received the kind of service they were looking for and in the manner they desired, as long as it did not compromise a police investigation. For example, as mentioned above, some complainants wanted a police officer to attend in person, while others did not want a police officer to come to their house, others just wanted to feel like they have been heard, and others only wanted a police file number for an insurance claim. Triaging lower priority calls for service well in the first instance could ensure that the police responded properly, according to their requirements to maintain public safety, while also responding in ways that respected the time and preference of the complainant.

Some participants were also concerned with the situation where someone called the police and was either on hold with dispatch for an extended period or had to wait a long period of time for the police to call them back or attend the scene. This might suggest to the complainant that the police did not value their concern and might harm the relationship between the public and the police. In the case of being placed on hold for an extended period of time, this type of situation might increase the risk to the complainant, threaten their safety, or even put their life in jeopardy. Of note, a small number of participants were also concerned that some people might call the non-emergency number and after being on hold for an extended time, might hang up resulting in an element of crime or disorder that the police, over time, were not aware of.

It should also be mentioned that the complexity associated with even lower priority calls for service has increased in many jurisdictions over the past decade. For example, participants reported that a call for service related to shoplifting might seem rather routine and would not take a lot of time. However, participants indicated that even the most mundane call for service has a greater likelihood of involving someone suffering from a mental health issue or having an addiction, which complicated the issue and the amount of time it took to clear the call. In effect, from the perspective of participants, given the amount of paperwork associated with a call for service, the effects of judicial decisions and case law, the increased rates of mental health and addiction issues, a lower priority call for service that might have been concluded in 30 minutes one decade ago might now take an officer three hours to resolve.

As mentioned above, several participants indicated that young people were much more comfortable using their mobile phones to interact with the police. It should also be noted that this might also be the case for younger police officers. As a result, one of the challenges indicated by participants was the disconnect between patrol officers being very comfortable interacting with the complainant of a lower priority call for service through text, social media, email, or a phone call, whereas senior management was less enthusiastic about these forms of interactions, preferring that their officers engaged in more face-to-face interactions. The suggestion was that younger officers might be less comfortable with face-to-face interactions. Regardless of the method of communication, participants acknowledged that a challenge was keeping the complainant informed about their call for service. Several participants indicated that every police officer, at a minimum, should call back and follow up with a complainant on their call for service. Given how busy the police were, it was recognized that this could be challenging; however, participants stated that this was both very important and valuable to the public. One example provided was a call for service about a

suspicious vehicle. As it is common for these calls to be concluded after a general duty officer conducts a patrol of the area and determined that the vehicle was Gone on Arrival (GOA), participants indicated that it would be best practice for the officer or someone else to immediately call the complainant to explain that the vehicle was gone, to thank them for the call, and to let them know that they should call back if the vehicle returns. It was felt that this was very doable, reasonable, met the expectations of the public, and contributed to building trust and confidence in the police.

Another theme was that some police agencies have made the decision to not have an officer attend certain types of calls for service. For example, some police agencies will not attend any Priority 4 call for service. The challenge identified with this approach was ensuring that no calls for service were misclassified and, therefore, were not responded to by the police when they should have. There was also the concern that patterns of crimes might be missed. For example, in cases where there was a theft from auto, in the absence of any evidence or the need for some follow-up, that call would not have an officer attend in many police jurisdictions. However, if there were several thefts from autos in a location, participants believed that the SOPs needed to change to address this trend. This might include sending officers to do a canvas for possible video evidence or increasing patrols in the area. This point of view speaks again to the value of an in-house call centre and the beneficial role that crime analysts could play in examining lower priority calls for service.

There were also several concerns or challenges expressed by participants related to the online reporting system. One concern was the recognition that there was a need to monitor the types of files that were reported online. This required someone to review the files to ensure that there were not files reported online that should not have been. However, doing so in real-time was a resourcing issue, even though the number of online reports was low. Related to the inability of some police agencies to review the online reporting files in real-time was a concern that some people were reporting more serious offences through the online system to avoid wait times associated with calling the emergency or non-emergency phone numbers. Participants were concerned that complainants were not aware that using the online reporting system might result in an officer not reviewing the file for 24 hours or more. This was particularly problematic if the nature of the call required a more immediate police response. Participants indicated that there were times where a Priority 1 or 2 call for service was reported through the online reporting system and not caught for some time. **In effect, it was critical for the police to ensure that their messaging about how to use the online reporting system was clear about when this method of reporting should be used and what the time delay might be between when the incident was reported, and when the police reviewed and responded to the file.**

The other issue identified by participants was the potential for fraud when using the online reporting system. The concern was that, for example, someone could report a Break & Enter with a lot of property reported missing; however, an officer would not attend the scene to discuss the incident with the complainant or to investigate the issue. This might allow for the complainant to report that much more property was missing than would be possible if an officer attended the scene and investigated the matter. The concern was that the online reports were typically reviewed to determine if there might be some video evidence that could be collected, rather than whether the amount of property stolen was even possible. On a related note, some participants indicated that

when they called the complainant back because they indicated that there was video evidence, when the police asked whether the complainant had reviewed the video, the most common response was no. The concern was that it took time for the police to collect the video evidence and review it to determine that there was no evidence on the video, or the quality of the video made in unacceptable for court. As such, some participants indicated that **it would be helpful to provide a question in the online reporting system about whether the complainant had reviewed the video evidence when reporting an incident.**

### **PARTICIPANTS' VIEW OF EXPANDING THE USE OF NON-SWORN CIVILIANS**

Participants offered a diverse array of views regarding the potential for police organisations to develop and implement non-sworn member programs to improve efficacy in responding to lower priority calls for service. Across the various agencies represented in this study, participants reported three different types of non-sworn programs administered by the police: reserves, special municipal constables, and operational support officers. The commonality across all three programs was the utility of these types of programs as a pipeline for recruiting people to join the police. Numerous participants spoke of the passion and engagement that was demonstrated by non-sworn program participants. Participants resoundingly spoke of the quality of their new hires being superior when those individuals had previously participated in a non-sworn program. This was important because participants reported that police organisations across Canada had become seriously challenged in their recruiting efforts. Another benefit of non-sworn programs reported by participants was the increased visibility in the community when non-sworn were out conducting patrols. It was suggested that the presence of non-sworn may not actually reduce calls for service, but their ability to be seen in the community was effective in improving public perceptions of community safety. In sum, participants felt that the presence of additional uniforms visible to the public increased the public's satisfaction with their local police.

Irrespective of the type of program (paid vs. unpaid), participants expressed safety concerns whenever non-sworn individuals were interacting with the public. Of particular note, participants expressed concern that the general public was often unable to distinguish between non-sworn and sworn officers when the uniform was too similar. It was noted that despite often highly visible markings, such as the word "Reserve" across the back of the uniform, the public lacked the awareness of police programs to understand that this meant that the individual was not actually a police officer and did not have the necessary tools or authority to respond in the same way. Even participants who had previously served as a non-sworn officers prior to becoming a police constable expressed concern for safety, suggesting that, at the time, they did not understand how much risk was inherent in wearing a police-like uniform without the use of force tools, training, and legal authority to respond as police. Other participants expressed concerns about the redundancy created by these programs noting that it was often the case that the non-sworn officer responded to an incident and then had to call for assistance from a sworn police officer. In this case, the municipality was paying for both the non-sworn and sworn officers, thereby adding to the resource drain being experienced by the police rather than just having a sworn member attend in the first instance.



Surprisingly, it was not common for participants to express concern about non-sworn roles taking work away from sworn police officers. It was suggested that policing had become so administrative that police officers were frequently so busy with paperwork and other obligations that they were less available to respond to calls for service or to engage and interact with the public. As such, participants expressed a strong desire to have non-sworn civilians who could assist with tasks that did not present any risk, such as conducting administrative work inside a detachment or community policing station or conducting very low-risk administrative and transportation work in the community. These potential roles for non-sworn members will be discussed in greater detail below.

### Auxiliary Members and Reserve Constables

Numerous participants reported having worked with auxiliary or reserve officers during their career. Some reported positive experiences, while others expressed concerns, particularly safety related, indicating that reserve members should not be responding to calls for service or interacting with the public in situations where there was a known risk present, which, as noted above, was almost any call for service. For example, one participant described a situation where there were two reserve officers at a community skateboard park. Suddenly, an altercation developed that quickly escalated into an assault in progress involving bear spray. Other people present at the park looked to the reserve constables to respond. To some degree, the reserve constables had been trained and had less lethal force options with them, but this was a high-risk situation that developed seemingly out of nowhere. It was also felt that public expectations were challenged or damaged when the two uniformed officers, that the public perceived as police, did not get involved in trying to stop the assault. This was described as a no-win situation for both the reserve constable and the police agency.

The concern most frequently noted with respect to the reserve program was that it was suspended after two reserve constables were killed in the line of duty in two separate events. Beyond this, participants also noted the inherently problematic concern that reserves were unpaid, compensated only with volunteer hours. To this end, it was suggested that volunteers were best utilized in proactive community engagement roles based out of community policing programs and non-uniformed to present the absolute lowest level of risk. Another concern with volunteer auxiliary/reserves was the stringent and continuous requirements for participants to demonstrate professionalism inside and outside of their roles as volunteers because they were being perceived by the public as police officers. It was noted that this was a challenging requirement to maintain without pay, and that it was difficult to monitor and respond to infractions or errors in judgement in the absence of the professional standards and legislated consequences under the *Police Act*. A final note regarding this concern was that, if something were to happen, because they were not employees, and not protected by the *Police Act*, they would not have any medical or financial assistance or legal representation should it be required.

## Special Municipal Constables or Community Safety Officers – The Vancouver Police Department Approach

Vancouver's Community Constable Program was frequently noted by participants as a desirable model for non-sworn members. Participants with knowledge of the program noted several benefits and indicated that Community Safety Officers (CSOs) were seen as valuable within the VPD and able to support general duty by providing scene security, a task broadly perceived as fairly low risk but resource intensive. Another resource intensive task reported by participants was canvassing for CCTV. Given this, CSOs were frequently deployed to undertake this task with an overall resource expenditure that was significantly less than that of a police officer. CSOs also transported property, collected statements from witnesses in files considered low risk, and provided additional support at large events. Because CSOs in Vancouver were provided access to the Police Records and Information Management Environment (PRIME), they were also able to tag and log evidence and completed required follow-ups on lower priority calls for service. Importantly, the training for CSOs was done at the VPD, which allowed the VPD to maintain control of the knowledge, skills, and expectations communicated to new CSOs. It was further noted the training for CSOs included basic use of force. To that end, CSOs were issued a baton and OC spray, but not lethal force options, such as a firearm. They were also not provided with the standard issue taser. Participants with knowledge of the program viewed it as a valuable recruiting tool and participants reported that many current recruits in police agencies across the Lower Mainland were once CSOs in Vancouver. In sum, participants reported that, from their point of view, the experiences CSOs received in that role were very valuable for a career in policing and contributed to the crime reduction and crime prevention mandate of the police.

Still, participants noted some potential concerns related to the CSO program. For example, participants were concerned that it was possible for citizens to mistake CSOs for sworn police officers because of their uniform and vehicles. CSOs in Vancouver wear the powder blue uniform shirts that used to be standard issue for sworn police officers in Vancouver. Moreover, CSOs drive marked cars that appear to be police cars but are not equipped with the standard or typical equipment found in a VPD police vehicle, such as firearms. For some participants, they were concerned that members of the public would not be able to distinguish that CSOs were not VPD Officers and so might expect the same type of behaviour, intervention, or authority from a CSO during an interaction. Finally, when asked about concerns related to the types of duties that CSO performed or could perform, participants noted that, initially, there was some resistance to this role from the police union; however, CSOs were included in the VPD's most recent collective agreement and, therefore, are likely permanent in the City of Vancouver. Participants felt that CSO's specific type of training and education made them a valuable addition to the VPD, and that their presence in the community might, in some circumstances, contribute to someone not calling the police for a lower priority issue. However, participants were not enthusiastic about CSOs responding to lower priority calls for service.

## Abbotsford Police Department's Operational Support Officers

In 2016, the Abbotsford Police Department (APD) launched the Operational Support Officer (OSO) program that uses civilian employees. These civilian members sign a one-year contract with the pay

level of a probationary constable. One OSO is assigned to each patrol shift. Holding peace officer status, but not that of a police officer, OSOs work in uniforms like those issued to APD police officers, but with “OSO” on the back. Unlike the VPD’s CSOs, APD’s OSOs only drive unmarked vehicles. However, like CSOs, OSOs are issued force options, including a baton and OC spray, but not the lethal force options, such as a firearm. At a broad level, the OSO program was reported to be a recruiting and training initiative where the OSO was able to participate in significant police training and the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities in hopes of a future position as a police officer with APD. According to participants with knowledge of the program, OSOs were assigned a variety of low-risk tasks, including conducting the vast majority of video canvassing, canvassing for witnesses to be interviewed by a police officer, traffic direction, theft from auto files where the call for service required attendance, and document services. From the perspective of participants with knowledge of this program, the program was reported to be very effective and almost all OSOs were hired into the service as police officers when their one-year contract was completed. It was noted that when an OSO was performing well but needed more experience, the contract could be extended by six months. If, for whatever reason, the OSO was underperforming, the contract could be terminated after the one-year period, ending the employment relationship.

Regardless of whether participants had direct knowledge of APD’s program, when discussing the notion of civilian roles, participants noted the positive aspects as a pre-employment program. It was suggested that these roles allowed those interested in policing the opportunity to receive important training and experience that contributed to a self-assessment and an organisational assessment of whether policing was the right kind of career.

It should be noted that not all participants agreed that there was a role for non-sworn to take on duties traditionally assigned to a police office. The main concerns centred around issues of safety when a uniform was issued to someone without lethal force training and options, and the issues that arose when the public assume the uniformed officer had all the capabilities to respond to any situation, but the non-sworn member does not. Some respondents noted the inherent risk in this, both in the potential for a situation to become violent, and in the inherent risk that existed in having individuals that do not have the training, authority, and lethal force of police officers walking around in uniforms that suggested to the average citizen that the person is a police officer. Moreover, participants suggested that the presence of the unarmed officer may increase the risk for police because, if a situation became violent, the officer was responsible for protection of the non-sworn member in addition to self-protection. In other words, in addition to being concerned for themselves and the incident, the officer had to ensure that the non-sworn officer was also safe. Another concern frequently iterated was that non-sworn officers were not given access to police databases, including PRIME and the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC). As a result, not having access to information about the people they were interacting with increased the risk because they were a uniformed presence in a situation without all the information that could keep them and others safe. Moreover, not having access to police databases limited their task capacity because they are unable to input information and conclude files, both of which could save officer time.

## The Potential Roles for Non-Sworn Members

Participants were asked about their views on the potential roles for paid non-sworn civilians, such as OSOs and special municipal constables across Lower Mainland communities. The theme across responses was that while ensuring the safety of non-sworn civilians was paramount, there existed numerous tasks that could be designated to non-sworn civilians. One such task was stolen vehicle recovery. Participants noted that it was not uncommon for a vehicle to be discovered that had been abandoned or dumped days or weeks prior to its discovery. Given this, there was no risk present, so a non-sworn civilian could remain onsite and wait for a tow truck. For officers with experience with already existing OSO and CSO models, the capacity for those non-sworn officers to secure the scene for very lower risk non-violent files, such as a motor vehicle crashes where there was no loss of life or serious injury was seen as valuable. Another role suggested by participants was the use of non-sworn civilians to provide additional manpower for grid searches. In this role, the individuals would be present onsite with sworn officers but were not interacting with the public. In addition, several participants noted the utility of using non-sworn in collecting and documenting video evidence related to lower risk lower priority calls for service. Another role that could be completed by non-sworn civilians was document service. Several participants noted this was possible because non-sworn civilians were sworn as peace officers but not police officers. It was suggested that this activity was very resource intensive, generally low risk, and did not require a sworn police officer. The assertion was that if there was any element of risk present, non-sworn civilians could book appointments for clients to come in and conduct document service in a community police station or the detachment/department headquarters where sworn officers were present. It was felt that this would mitigate any potential risk. Where the disagreement became apparent between some participants was with whether non-sworn civilians could be used to review video evidence. One participant noted that should body cameras become mandatory for all police officers in British Columbia, there would be a need for a very large video review unit just to meet the disclosure requirements set out in *R. v. Stinchcombe*. As a result, many participants argued that it would be very valuable if non-sworn members could fill those roles rather than the far more expensive sworn officers. Regardless of the needs or interests of different police agencies, the senior police executives in this study noted that WorkSafeBC requirements would ultimately be an important determining factor in the types of roles that non-sworn civilians can undertake.

Beyond the notion of uniformed quasi-enforcement, there were various other roles and tasks that participants suggested could, and perhaps should, be assigned to non-sworn civilian employees. Several participants indicated that their organisation was considering whether those responsible for accessing mobile devices and computer hard drives seized by the police and downloading the data contained on these devices needed to be sworn police officers. Participants noted that **there would need to be training in continuity of evidence and court testimony for non-sworn civilians, but it was suggested that this was a role that required significant technological capacity and ongoing education, both of which became very challenging when sworn members must rotate through this type of position in a tenure system.** Similarly, participants believed that non-sworn members could be effectively used to review and record the enormous volumes of video evidence received by police organisations, noting that there were no reasons that required this time consuming but necessary work to be completed by a sworn police officer.

Another participant suggested that perhaps it was time for police organisations to consider whether the person tasked with all of the administrative duties in recruiting new officers needed to be completed by a sworn member. There is inherent value in having sworn police officers speaking to recruits at events and job fairs, but there may be value in having the person in charge of recruiting be a non-sworn civilian. It was again noted that because of the required rotation of tenure, the person in charge of recruiting seemed to change quite frequently, and the role was largely administrative, which was perhaps not the best use of police resources. Other roles mentioned by participants included fingerprinting, document service, subpoena service for low-risk files, and concluding lower priority calls by telephone.

### **CAPACITY FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO ENGAGE IN REDUCING LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

Participants were asked about a variety of partners, other public safety agencies, and municipal community programs that could assist in responding to and reducing the number of lower priority calls for service.

### **BYLAWS**

Participants iterated that municipalities could reduce police calls for service and save money by implementing an engaged and robust municipal bylaw department with bylaw officers working shifts that included evenings and weekends. It was frequently suggested that numerous types of files, including noise complaints, homelessness (unwanted person) where there is no criminal offence, panhandling, parking issues, and many other types of calls for service regarding unsightly or nuisance properties could and should be handled in the first instance by bylaw officers, as many of these were viewed as bylaw issues. Participants indicated that, as the system currently exists, there was a double resourcing of every call for service that was for a bylaw offence. Given the numerous calls for service regarding homelessness, for example, participants suggested that the capacity for bylaw officers to respond as the first point of contact was desirable and beneficial for police who were working to avoid criminalising homelessness. Moreover, in many communities, because bylaw officers did not work evenings and weekends, when adequate resources were not available, police attended these lower priority calls for service and then referred the file over to bylaw officers for follow-up. When bylaw officers were on shift, police referred the file over to them, but not until resources had been expended by virtue of initially receiving and addressing the call for service. In both circumstances, the municipality was paying for the police to respond to the call for service in the first instance and then having a bylaw officer respond and conclude the file, which was viewed by participants as inefficient and a waste of police and municipal resources. Participants noted that, even in communities in which bylaw officers remained on shift until 21:30, that was not late enough as many calls for service were received by the police after that time. Participants suggested that the implementation of a 24-hour bylaw call taker would alleviate pressure on E-Comm for police calls for service and result in significant financial savings.

## MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY SAFETY OFFICERS (CSOs)

Several Lower Mainland municipalities had either begun to or were considering the implementation of municipally funded and managed community safety officers. Participants perceived the CSO Program as offering a positive contribution to public perceptions of safety and offered two reasons for why they were particularly appreciative of the program. The first was that was that the program was municipally funded and managed, so there are no additional liability concerns for police. The second was that, given the look of the CSO uniform, there was rarely any confusion among members of the public about whether a CSO was a police officer. Participants felt that this was an important distinction. That said, a few participants noted that there were efforts in some communities to have the CSOs deputized as constables. This effort was not supported by participants primarily because of the lack of necessary police training commonly offered to CSOs. Many participants hoped to see the role, but not the responsibility, of CSOs expanded. For example, some participants believed that the presence of CSOs near transit exchange loops would both offer a welcoming presence that improved public perceptions of safety, as well as another layer of deterrence for unlawful activity in those areas. In another example, CSOs were deployed in areas most frequented by homeless individuals. The presence of CSOs was sometimes likened to the tiered policing model in the UK

Some participants were concerned that because CSOs were not police officers, they were often treated with a general lack of respect from the public and often experienced harassment. To that end, police in some jurisdictions have offered to jointly patrol with CSOs to enhance their credibility and reaffirm the importance of their role in the community. This was viewed as important, not just for the self-esteem and safety of the CSOs, but also because some participants suggested that the presence of CSOs may be effective in improving perceptions of safety among some segments of the population in the areas they patrolled, such as the elderly. While not directly contributing to a reduction in lower priority calls for service, effective CSOs may contribute to reducing the need for a general duty police officer to always be present, which should provide officers more time to respond to other calls for service.

## MUNICIPAL AMBASSADORS

Municipal Ambassador programs have been present in the Lower Mainland for some time, but the COVID-19 pandemic particularly brought the program to light. In Maple Ridge, the Park Ambassador program sought to educate visitors about the importance of social distancing, ensure appropriate signage was maintained, and regularly clean commonly touched surfaces. Similarly, in Richmond, three small teams of Ambassadors served to educate and inform patrons about the importance of social distancing and public health guidelines. The programs, their iterations, and clothing worn by Ambassadors all vary across municipalities, such as wearing red shirts, blue shirts, or jackets with “Ambassador” on the back, with two important commonalities; the Ambassadors look nothing like police officers and their role was not enforcement but focused on public education. Participants offered very positive perceptions of these programs noting that they believed these additional “eyes and ears” on the ground were effective in preventing unlawful behaviour in public spaces. Their presence, often in traditionally problematic areas, was perceived to reduce lower priority calls for service with participants indicating that, irrespective of the lack of

an enforcement role, the public perceived Ambassadors as representatives of the city. Moreover, some participants believed that the presence of an ambassador, for example, in a park, served to increase community perceptions of safety and mitigated the risks presented by unsupervised youth hanging out. Participants believed that there was less deviant, delinquent, or anti-social behaviour with an engaged adult monitoring park activity. It was further suggested that deploying Municipal Ambassadors for festivals and celebrations may also be a worthwhile endeavor providing an additional layer of supervision in municipal spaces. It should be noted that not all participants shared the perception that Ambassadors were useful in crime prevention, with a few participants noting that though they believed the additional presence of municipal Ambassadors was positive in the areas they patrolled, they did not believe there was any net effect on crime, nor did they think that Ambassadors contributed substantially to a reduction in the number of lower priority calls for service as a result of being present in certain locations at certain times.

### MUNICIPALLY HIRED CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES

In several jurisdictions, participants spoke of the utility of municipally hired employees to assist police organisations in improving their effectiveness and efficiency in relation to lower priority calls for service. In several communities, municipally hired employees have taken over the role of managing community police offices, police volunteers, and crime prevention programs, such as Block Watch, Speed Watch, lockout auto crime, and volunteer bike patrols. Beyond an exclusively community policing role, participants spoke of recent initiatives that hired municipal employees to follow the Watches as information or public liaison officers. These employees were hired to improve citizen satisfaction with police, but also served to assist the Watch with administrative tasks, including scheduling appointments for complainants of lower priority calls to meet with an officer. This was seen as providing enormous value and improving resource efficiency.

Another innovative suggestion was for municipalities to hire community negotiators who could be the point of contact and mediator for disputes between neighbours. It was noted that these types of calls for service, such as a neighbour being upset about the position of another neighbour's security cameras or parked car, or tree and fence related disputes, should not be handled by a sworn police officer. Instead, a civilian employee could provide this type of service and work with the people involved to reach a mutually agreeable, positive resolution without the direct involvement of the police.

Participants also suggested that hiring municipal employees to assist police agencies in meeting the disclosure requirements of the *R. v. Stinchcombe* decision had also been very productive, noting that there was no need for a sworn officer to be photocopying and completing the time-consuming administrative work related to preparing a routine disclosure package. Participants indicated that it was common in Major Crime Units and other special investigation units for civilian employees to be hired specifically to serve on disclosure teams; however, participants noted that this kind of assistance at the general duty level would also be very welcome. Some police agencies already had municipal employees assisting with these duties so the absence of this was largely related to the size of the organisation. Of note, participants were not aware of any specific challenges or reasons why agencies could not hire municipal employees with administrative knowledge, skills, and abilities to carry out these largely administrative tasks, including downloading and processing

video submissions, downloading statements, photocopying documents, printing labels, putting together disclosure packages, and coordinating the receipt of the numerous disclosure pieces. In fact, it was noted that most police officers were not trained or particularly proficient in these skills, often rendering simple administrative tasks a time consuming and frustrating endeavour. As such, **the addition of qualified municipal civilian employees would likely improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these tasks and provide sworn officers more time to respond to calls for service, including lower priority calls.** Furthermore, it was noted that it would be very helpful to have these municipal employees work night shifts as there are often middle of the night detention hearings with a Justice of the Peace that require preparation of a package, and no one with the administrative skills necessary to assist with this working those late-night hours. As such, in the absence of this, police officers were spending hours at the photocopier and preparing packages rather than attending to calls for service on the road.

## Recommendations

This report identified several benefits and challenges associated with the ways that police agencies in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia responded to lower priority calls for service. The interviews with participants identified that there were several consistent approaches to responding to lower priority calls for service and, regardless of the size of the police agency, there were several common challenges. As a result, the recommendations presented below are focused on how to respond to and reduce the volume of lower priority calls for service more effectively and efficiently. While there were several suggestions highlighted throughout this report, this section focuses on the key recommendations.

### HUMAN RESOURCES

It is a requirement of every police agency to have enough patrol officers to respond to the volume of calls for service in their jurisdiction. Still, some jurisdictions have seen an increase in their population and their calls for service without a corresponding increase in the number of officers available to respond to lower priority calls for service. While it is common practice for police agencies to assess the volume, nature, and location of their calls for service routinely, this assessment should also include an evaluation of the proportion of shifts that operate at or near their minimum staffing levels and the effects that staffing levels have on response times related to lower priority calls for service. In effect, while many police agencies use some form of predictive policing matrix to determine the expected number of higher priority calls for service per shift and calculate the time to respond and shift levels, to address the workload issues related to the volume of calls for service that result in calls remaining in the queue for long periods of times or less than optimum responses or response times, it might be necessary to increase the minimum number of general duty members or those who are available to respond to a call for service on each Watch. Doing so should address the real or perceived view of participants that general duty or patrol officers are chronically understaffed and unable to effectively respond to lower priority calls for service. An increase in response-ready units should reduce the amount of time it takes to respond to lower priority calls for service, regardless of the method of response, contribute to enhancing the



public's trust and confidence in their police, and more closely align police response time to public expectations. Increasing the number of officers available to respond to calls for service may also have the added benefit of reducing individual member workloads, which might allow for a greater opportunity for members to better manage their current call load, continue to assist investigative services with aspects of their file management, as well as engage with the community more in ways that can contribute to reducing crime and increasing public safety.

As the population of a jurisdiction increases and the calls for service increase, there is also an increase in traffic density that increases the amount of time it takes for an officer to drive from one location to another. Moreover, because of judicial decisions, legislation, and policy, there are also many additional tasks and steps that members must complete to properly conclude a file that makes them unavailable to respond to incoming lower priority calls for service. While it is not the case that all members on a shift are occupied with a call for service when another call comes in, there are a variety of reasons for why a lower priority call for service is held in the queue. However, this places greater strain on the dispatch system and added pressure for those members who are responding to calls that can result in a reduction of morale and an increase in mental health related issues. It is also the case that the amount of time spent responding to a call for service and the amount of time at the scene of a call for service does not always involve just one police officer. Given all this, it is recommended that police agencies ensure that they have an adequate number of general duty members assigned to each shift to respond to calls for service and that the proportion of shifts that function at minimum staffing levels not be the norm.

It should be noted that participants did not feel that lower priority calls for service were considered not important by their police agency or that there was not a benefit to the public by responding to these calls in a timely fashion or at all. Instead, participants from medium and larger police agencies stated that there were simply not enough officers and not enough time for the police to respond to all calls for service quickly or in person. While it might not be financially feasible to have sufficient police officers to respond to all calls for service, having a large proportion of shifts staffed at minimum levels likely contributes to decisions to not respond to certain types of calls for service, to delays in response times, and for calls for service to remain in the CAD for long periods of time. However, in the era of defund the police and reduced police budgets, the solution of adding police officers is not always going to be feasible. Therefore, this recommendation should be considered in conjunction with the other recommendations outlined below.

## **REVIEWING STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

Given the diversity in call for service volume, the specific nature of the calls for service, staffing levels, and public expectation, it is not reasonable for every police agency in the Lower Mainland to have the same processes and procedures for responding to calls for service. Instead, each police agency has developed their own SOPs for calls for service, including lower priority calls for service. It is recommended that each police agency periodically review their SOPs to ensure that they always reflect not just the capacities and needs of the police agency, but changing and emerging crime trends, shifts in public expectations, the appearance of a particular issue or concern, and best

practices. It is also recommended that changes in SOPs occur in consultation with the public and that changes to SOPs need to be communicated extremely clearly to the community, especially when the SOP shifts towards the police not attending certain types of lower priority calls for service in person anymore. To this end, police organisations may be well served to develop community specific SOPs related to residential and commercial alarms, as well as differential response to motor vehicle accidents. Within the police agency, changes to SOPs that result in police not attending certain types of calls in person need to be explained carefully to not promote the notion that the police do not think those types of calls are important. Moreover, if the change in SOP is to start attending calls that officers typically do not want to attend, do not like attending, or do not see the value in attending, the reasons need to be explained very clearly by supervisors and senior police leaders to ensure that these calls are responded to properly and professionally.

It is also recommended, if not already being done, that every police agency select a random sample of lower priority calls for service and call the complainant to inquire about how they felt about the service the police provided them. Alternatively, police agencies can create an online portal to allow for feedback to be provided online. This could be done every quarter and the information should be shared with each Watch. The information could be used to assist in modifying or establishing new SOPs related to how officers respond and address lower priority calls for service. Moreover, this conversation could also be used to inquire about whether the complainant was aware of the online reporting system, and whether their preferred method of interaction was in person, over the phone, texting, messaging, or online.

### **POLICE LEADERS EMPHASISING THE IMPORTANCE OF LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

As has been mentioned throughout this report, for some police agencies, it is simply not practical to respond to every call for service by having a police officer attend the scene or meet with the complainant in person. Nonetheless, this does not mean that, whenever possible, police officers should not attend a lower priority calls for service. While this report has discussed the numerous benefits of police attending lower priority calls for service from the public's point of view, there are several important benefits to police officers, especially more novice officers. As lower priority calls for service more commonly involve 'lower stakes' incidents, issues, or interactions, these types of calls for service provide officers with opportunities to interact with the public, practice their communication skills, and develop their investigation skills, including collecting evidence and taking statements. All these skills are necessary aspects of policing and will serve a police officer well throughout their policing careers. As such, to the degree possible, police leaders should encourage their officers to attend lower priority calls for service and emphasize the benefits and importance of doing so to the community and the career of the officer. Police officers can learn about the issues and people in the communities they police by attending lower priority calls for service, can resolve issues that are of concern to the public, and can have a positive influence on people and events in the community.

As mentioned above, there are many tangible and intangible benefits of police officers attending as many lower priority calls for service as possible from the perspective of the community. Perhaps the most important benefit is the opportunity to build rapport with the public, establish and

enhance a feeling of trust in the police, and provide the complainant and the community with the sense that their concerns were heard, taken seriously, and that someone cares about their issues. These objectives do not only occur if a police officer attends the call for service in person but can be reflected in the type of response provided or the lack of any response. Again, the authors of this report fully understand the challenges and limitations associated with trying to send a uniformed officer to every call for service, let alone lower priority calls for service, particularly for medium and larger police agencies. Nonetheless, it is very important that police leaders do not foster the impression that lower priority calls for service are a nuisance for police, something to ignore, or something that they are forced to respond to but really should not. As discussed in another recommendation, there are certain types of calls for service that police could rely on others to address, but police leaders should ensure that their police agency understands and reflects the value that all calls for service involve someone reaching out to the police looking for help or assistance, and that every call for service is another opportunity for the officer to practice and develop their skills while serving the public. As such, it is recommended that police leaders communicate routinely with their officers the reasons why they are being tasked with responding to lower priority calls for service and how doing so in a meaningful way contributes to the larger mission of the police and fosters a more positive relationship between the police and the communities they serve.

### **ESTABLISHING A CALLBACK RESPONSE APPROACH TO LOWER PRIORITY CALLS FOR SERVICE**

As outlined by participants, there were several inefficiencies in how police agencies responded to lower priority calls. With respect to the lower priority calls for service that do not require a member to attend immediately, participants and the literature review suggested that having an appointments-based response system is an effective approach to responding to those calls for service. In this approach, dispatch or officers at the police agency set up an appointment with the complainant with a time and location when a member or a representative of the police will address their concern and provide feedback to the caller. Depending on the staffing levels of the police agency and the volume and nature of these calls for service, the police agency might consider allocating a certain amount of time in each general duty member's shift to attending appointments. Another approach could be to allocate an officer's entire shift to attending appointments related to lower priority calls for service. If adopting the latter approach, modified duty or light duty officers could be assigned to take the appointments in the detachment or police department. Appointments could also be made for people to come into the police station or community police offices, for example, to drop off video evidence or provide an audio or video statement.

The benefits of an appointment approach is that it allows for lower priority calls for service to be responded to and completed in a reasonable amount of time, reduces the effect of these types of calls on the typical workload of general duty members during their shifts, eliminates sending two police officers to lower priority calls for service in police agencies with two-member cars, increases the police agency's ability to more effectively manage these types of calls, and, equally important, can contribute to a more positive relationship between the public and the police. Appointments can

also increase the privacy of the complainant and allow the complainant, if necessary, to speak with a police officer.

In addition to using a callback response approach to make appointments, this approach can also be used to resolve issues in the first instance or to triage the call for service to increase the probability of a more appropriate response. Calling the complainant back before an officer is dispatched to the scene can serve to eliminate the call from the queue and allow the police to better triage the call for service by asking more probing questions. In those cases where the officer is able to resolve the issue over the phone or set up an appointment with the complainant, this approach will save the time needed to drive to the scene, free up members on the watch to attend to higher priority calls for service, provide the complainant with an opportunity to update the police on the situation, such as letting the police know that the matter has been resolved or that a police officer was no longer required, and, importantly, allow the complainant to speak with a police officer. Calling the complainant back can increase the satisfaction of the complainant because they are not waiting for a police officer to attend with no update or feedback from the police. It would also provide an opportunity for the police to explain either the delay in their response or the reasons why the police would not be attending the scene in person. Again, this responsibility could be given to members who require either temporary or permanent accommodations. These members could even conduct investigations over the phone so that, if a member is to attend at a scheduled time, they are aware of what evidence they should collect, or who they should take statements from. These officers could also let the complainant know what they should bring to the police station to expedite their file.

## **ONLINE REPORTING**

As mentioned above, at the time of this report, police agencies in the Lower Mainland were at various stages of implementing online reporting for lower priority calls for service. However, it was recognized by participants and the authors of this report that online reporting was still in a pilot project phase or very early in its implementation. As such, participants indicated that online reporting was being used very sparingly by the public. At this relatively early stage of adopting online reporting, every police agency should review the nature and volume of online reporting against their SOPs to ensure that it is being used appropriately and whether modifications to the type of incidents or the nature of the incidents needs to be made. Related to this point, as soon as there is a sufficiently large database, perhaps after six months of data collection, it is recommended that each police agency evaluate how well the system is working and whether there are additional file types or incidents that could be added to the eligible list of incidents for online reporting. It is also recommended that police agencies set up a survey that people can fill out after completing their online report to solicit user feedback on their experience and view of the online reporting system.

Given the concerns raised by some of the participants in this study, it is recommended that police agencies continue to promote the online reporting system, the purpose and requirements for online reporting, and how to use online reporting. Critically, it should be made clear that there would be a time delay between when an incident was reported online and when the police would review and

respond to the file. While the volume of online reporting, for the most part, does not warrant any additional resources allocated to reviewing the files generated by the system, given the potential for abuse, error, or more serious incidents being reported in the online environment, police agencies should ensure that files are reviewed as quickly as possible. Much like the phone response model, police agencies could assign light duty, modified duty, or accommodated officers on each Watch to also review the online reporting system to ensure that there are no files reported to the online system that require a more immediate police response.

## **LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY**

The capacity to leverage technology to reduce resources, time, and expenditures is a well-established method to improving performance and being more efficient. To that end, the implementation of technology, such as the AXION program currently used in Abbotsford (<https://www.axiomtechnologies.com>), to assist police in recording and uploading digital audio and video statements and evidence to the cloud, deserves further consideration and evaluation across police agencies. Several participants reported that improvements in the processes of digital evidence packing and submission, including establishing a process for the public to submit video evidence without requiring a police officer to collect it, would significantly reduce the amount of time and resources dedicated to this activity as it relates to lower priority calls for service. It is recommended that whenever the opportunity exists for non-sworn, civilian employees to be assigned administrative duties, including the collection of digital evidence, and uploading it for review, this should be considered as it reduces the burden on sworn members allowing them more time to focus on all tasks related to responding and investigating calls for service.

In addition to leveraging technology in how the public reports lower priority incidents through online reporting, police should always similarly leverage technology to decrease the amount of time it takes to clear a lower priority call for service, such as using messaging applications, email, and mobile phones. Rather than travelling to a lower priority call for service, where appropriate, police officers should be encouraged to call complainants or use messaging applications, email, or virtual meetings to interact with the complainant. Not only would this save travelling time but, as detailed above, many people would rather use these forms of communication when interacting with others, including the police. In other words, younger people are much more comfortable using their phones or interacting in an online environment. Providing these options to a complainant for lower priority calls for service might encourage people to report and interact with the police more, respects the preferred method of communication of the complainant, and can save officer time while still providing the same level of attention and consideration to the issue or incident.

## **BYLAWS**

In every jurisdiction, participants noted concerns that police were responding to numerous calls that could and should be solely directed to bylaw officers. It was frequently iterated that the nature of bylaw enforcement requires that officers be able to respond to calls for bylaw-related service on late-night and weekend shifts. However, in communities across the Lower Mainland, participants noted that bylaw officers primarily worked weekdays and dayshifts exclusively. Some communities

have programs that participants suggested were quite useful in relieving police officer from lower priority bylaw-related calls for service. While participants noted that safety was always a concern for bylaw officers, there were many calls for service that did not require police to attend or be present at. Moreover, in every Lower Mainland community, homelessness was noted as a bylaw-related issue that dominated lower priority calls for service. To this end, the multi-agency task forces, including ministry departments and bylaw officers working with police, were reported as successful in reducing homelessness-related calls for service in the queue.

To address the large number of calls for service directed towards police that fall within the mandate of bylaws, it is recommended to integrate bylaw officers more with police. In other words, there are efficiencies that can be gained by coordinating bylaw and police more directly, similar to the approach taken in the cities of Surrey and Kelowna. To achieve this greater degree of integration, it would be necessary to identify bylaw officers who would be willing to work shift hours like the police. For example, it is common for bylaw officer to work shifts from 08:00 to 16:00 or from 09:00 to 17:00. However, for this recommendation to work, those bylaw officers that would be further integrated with the police might work 08:00 to 16:00 and 16:00 to 24:00 shifts, for example. In addition, those bylaw officers selected for greater integration with the police would need to receive more in-depth screening and a higher level of security to work with police. These bylaw officers could work out of City Hall with shared communications with the police or in a designated area of the police station, and assist the police on issues related to homelessness, nuisance properties, and calls for service that require the services of both the city and the police. The benefit of this type of approach is that it increases the knowledge and expertise of both bylaw officers and police officers, as police do not necessarily know all the bylaws that may apply in a situation and the police know what is a criminal offence. Furthermore, having bylaw officers working with the police, especially in the evenings, would allow for those calls for service that are a bylaw issue or require the presence of a bylaw officer to have one available, and the police could limit their involvement to only those types of calls in which there is a safety issue for the bylaw officer or where there is ongoing nuisance or problems for both the City and the police. In addition, this would reduce the number of files that police create and need to clear that are not police issues. In terms of disadvantages to this approach, there would be the need for the police to security clear and train the necessary number of bylaw officers, and this additional training and shift work might result in the need to pay these bylaw officers a higher wage. It is also important to have some consistency in which bylaw officers do this work to control costs and ensure that there is an adequate return on investment for police, in terms of the costs associated with security clearing, training, sharing communications, and, where appropriate or needed, working out of the police station.

## **MUNICIPAL CONSULTATION WITH POLICE**

Participants, particularly those in more senior management roles, noted that it would be helpful if there were more meaningful consultations with the police on municipal government policy motions that could result in significant effects on police resourcing and responses. Examples provided by participants included decisions to reroute traffic for extended periods through residential neighbourhoods. Participants reported that these decisions would sometimes result in significant

increases in the number of lower priority calls for service, particularly related to neighborhood traffic issues. Participants noted that it was not the role of the police to approve or deny decisions that are within the authority of municipal or city councils, but the process of meaningful consultation could result in the development of better policy options that considered all the intended and unintended consequences of the proposed changes or provided sufficient time for the police and the public to prepare for the policy change or the expected consequences of the decision. Given that municipalities pay the bulk of policing costs, it seems somewhat counterintuitive to make decisions without consulting with the police on decisions that have the potential to substantially increase police resource expenditures.

### **E-COMM AND OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS CENTERS**

Numerous participants indicated concerns that calls for service were sometimes not being appropriately triaged by E-Comm resulting in police attending calls for service in person that did not require an officer. Based on the interviews, there appears to be two ways to improve the triaging of calls for service. The first way is for police agencies to establish their own OCCs; however, as outlined above, this can be extremely expensive and cost prohibitive. Still, having one's own OCC would allow for the creating of agency specific SOPs, dispatchers and call-takers who are extremely familiar with the policies of the police agency, the officers who respond to calls for service, the patterns, volume, and nature of calls for service, the traffic patterns in the jurisdiction, emerging crime trends, community expectations, and police staffing levels. Having one's own OCC would also allow for officers to be staffed in the radio room that could assist dispatchers in triaging calls, setting priority levels, and determine the type and level of response to a call.

Given that it is unlikely that police agencies would be able to establish their own OCCs, a second recommendation would be to create a team of qualified, trained, and experienced police officers from several RCMP detachments and municipal police departments assigned to E-Comm to assist dispatchers and call-takers to triage challenging calls for service. In this way, dispatchers and call-takers could ask a team member for their advice in how to classify a call or whether to dispatch an officer to a call. While there is a Division Duty Officer attached to E-Comm currently, and there is the ability to phone an officer when needed, it is more efficient to have people in the radio room to assist as needed. Moreover, the responsibility of the Division Duty Officer is not to assist in the priority classification of calls for service. As discussed above, having police officers assigned to the radio room was seen as an added value in assisting call takers to more appropriately triage calls for service, and could offer immediate assistance on the telephone to determine the most appropriate response level, thereby ensuring that the lower priority calls for service were appropriately assigned in the CAD queue. Rather than assigning active members to this role, consideration should be given to E-Comm hiring recently retired, experienced police officers to assist call takers in effectively and efficiently assigning priority levels. Their presence in the moment may offer opportunities for improved service delivery given their immediate feedback, knowledge, skills, and abilities. The capacity to leverage the triage process by incorporating individuals with recent significant policing experience could result in a more effective service delivery model at E-Comm with the potential for significant resource related savings. Another possible way to staff these positions is to use members who are on restricted duties.

## **SUPPLEMENTING POLICE RESPONSES WITH MUNICIPALLY HIRED CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES**

Participants in this study consistently expressed concern for the safety of non-sworn civilians responding to any kind of police call for service. Their concerns were mainly in the areas of safety, training, liability, and the inherently unpredictable nature of policing. By and large, participants suggested that the reserve programs of the past were no longer a tenable response option given the shooting deaths of Reserve Corporal Nathan Cirillo and Constable David Wynn that also resulted in serious injury to accompanying Auxiliary officer Derek Bond. That said, participants noted that there were ways that administrative and low-risk tasks that have become a routine and time-consuming part of policing could be reassigned to civilian employees.

In recent years, because of disclosure requirements, police have become inundated with administrative responsibilities that could be completed more efficiently by non-sworn civilian employees with the necessary administrative knowledge, skills, and abilities. To this end, it is recommended that police agencies audit the administrative duties undertaken by police officers, particularly related to evidence packaging, evidence submission, and completing disclosure packages, that could be more efficiently undertaken or delegated to municipally hired non-sworn civilian employees. In addition to the time-saving contributions that training and developing non-sworn members to undertake these types of tasks, there is the added potential benefit of consistency and duration in these positions. As civilian members are not as likely to rotate to other responsibilities as a result of the desire or pressure for promotion, it is likely that there will be much less turn-over in personnel who need to be trained to undertake their tasks, which should result in a greater level of expertise and efficiency. Some communities have already moved towards hiring and training civilian employees for positions that were once sworn roles, including managing community police offices, public communication and liaison officers, and trained Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) coordinators. It is recommended that police agencies review the duties associated with particularly administrative roles, including digital evidence, community policing, and recruiting to determine whether a civilian employee might more effectively be tasked with those duties, with continuity as an added benefit because the tenure system would not apply.

Numerous participants also suggested that duties related to document services, including serving subpoenas, summons, and DNA collection, could be assigned to non-sworn members. In the larger policing organisations, these roles could be assigned to municipally hired special constables as in Vancouver and Abbotsford. In both of those communities, special municipal constables are also able to assist with the recovery of stolen vehicles, motor vehicle crashes, scene security for low-risk incidents, and as a force multiplier when conducting specific policing tasks, such as grid searches. Both the relevant literature and many of participants in this study supported these types of roles for non-sworn members and noted the added benefits of a special constable type of program as a recruiting tool where candidates hired into these roles were offered the opportunity to experience what being a police officer was like, thus giving these people a sense of what a career in policing might be like. As an additional benefit to the police agency, by committing to this type of program, the agency was provided with valuable insight into personal suitability and organisational fit of the candidate.



In smaller communities or those where there was limited capacity to resource, develop, and implement special municipal constable programs, another option is the hiring of Contracted Commissionaires assigned to serve subpoenas and summons in situations where there was no public safety concern. It was noted that Contracted Commissionaires could also collect DNA samples and could be used for other administrative duties, such as inventory control where an employee can sign out firearms and radios to officers at the beginning of their shifts. As this position usually involves only interacting with police officers and occurs in the police department or detachment, it is recommended that this position be carried out by a civilian employee. As an example, at Abbotsford Police Department, this role is fulfilled by commissionaires. While the research literature does not specifically address commissionaires, there is a large and growing literature in support of this type of program by suggesting that these types of duties were reported to be effectively completed by civilian employees assigned to these types of support roles without taking a sworn police officer away from the road.

Both the participants familiar with these types of programs and the research literature on the potential for non-sworn roles to supplement police in responding to lower priority calls for service concluded that police agencies would be well served to review their current service delivery models and consider the utility of these alternative options, including municipally hired special constables and contracted commissionaires. Again, with respect to these low-risk activities, having these types of programs in place can serve to free up sworn police officers to undertake other duties associated with responding to calls for service, the investigation of files, and file completion.

### **CALLS FOR SERVICE RELATED TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

Most participants expressed concerns regarding the ever-increasing number of calls for service where there was an identifiable mental health concern. It was suggested by participants that this was one of the primary concerns with sending any non-sworn members to respond to what appeared, in the first instance, to be a lower priority call for service. To this end, several participants noted the dearth of data collection specifically around mental health related calls for service, which impeded the ability of police agencies to develop appropriate responses to lower priority calls for service. By and large, participants were unable to enumerate the number of lower priority calls for service where the officer arrived to find the situation escalated as a result of mental health issues, but they indicated that this was not an insignificant proportion of lower priority calls for service. As such, most participants suggested that without an analysis of this data, virtually all lower priority calls for service had to be considered to have an inherent level of risk that would negate sending a non-sworn response. In effect, given the evolution of policing across the Lower Mainland, it would be very helpful and prudent for police agencies to collect and analyse data about the volume and nature of calls for service that included a mental health component. The collection and analysis of this type of data would be useful for future consideration of the role that non-sworn members could play in the reduction and response to lower priority calls for service. Some participants noted a VPD initiative that did not permit the file to be concluded without the officer identifying whether the call for service had a mental health component as a step in the right direction towards collecting this type of data. Given the economics of policing, the capacity for police agencies to accurately enumerate the volume of mental health related calls makes such a

program worth undertaking to improve the police's response to lower priority calls for service and to allow for the development and implementation of additional data-driven risk prediction initiatives.

## Conclusion

In the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, the majority of calls for police service are classified as lower priority. Both the literature and results of the interviews completed in the current project suggested that while there was inherent value to having police officers respond to these types of calls, there were also more effective and efficient approaches that can be used to reduce the demand on police resources while still satisfying the public's demand and expectations of the police. Public perception of a police agency that responds to and interacts with the community in a responsible and respectful manner is extremely important, likely even more so today than in the past. Given this, it is critical for police to respond to calls for service, even lower priority calls, in ways that are both efficient for the police and align with public expectations and values.

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