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For Immediate Release | April 12, 2021

## Improving access to mental health supports

IH-Wide – Interior Health’s immunization program is rolling out across the region, much to the relief of many people searching for a “light at the end of the tunnel” during the pandemic. However, stress, isolation and anxiety continue to wear on people’s mental health.

Help is available and it is easier to access than ever before.

Three months after announcing an expanded phone line for community mental health and substance use services, Interior Health is receiving positive feedback as people find it easier to connect with supports in their community. The simple phone number 310-MHSU (6478) puts callers directly in touch with their local mental health and substance use centre, helping people access and navigate community supports.

“People living with mental health and substance use challenges deserve quick access to qualified supports that are available when and where they need them,” said Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “I’m pleased that the early, positive feedback is telling us that people are getting the help they need and I look forward to the coming months as even more people use the service and are connected to the supports to help them along their unique healing and recovery journey.”

The service launched in the South Okanagan in September 2020, and [expanded across the region](#) on Jan. 12, 2021. It is available to service providers as well as the general public who wish to connect to these services.

“The 310-MHSU phone number is one more way people can reach out for the support they need,” said Interior Health president and CEO, Susan Brown. “This challenging pandemic has left many people feeling anxious and uncertain and I encourage anyone struggling with mental health or substance use issues to call Interior Health for support.”

Those concerned about their mental wellness are encouraged to reach out for advice and support by:

- Call 310-MHSU (6478) to directly reach a local mental health and substance use centre.
- Contacting a primary care provider or local counselling service.
- For immediate and urgent mental health assistance call the Interior Health Crisis Line at 1-888-353-2273.
- First Nations and Aboriginal individuals can call the KUU-US Crisis Line Society 1-800-KUU-US17 (1-800-588-8717). These crisis response personnel are certified and trained in Indigenous cultural safety.
- The Métis Nation of BC also operates a 24/7 crisis line at 1-833-638-4722.
- Visit this [infographic](#) for more tips on managing anxiety during COVID-19.

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Additional supports are available online - visit the provincial [Virtual Mental Health Supports During COVID-19](#) for a collection of mental health supports available to people anywhere in B.C.

Mental health and substance use services for people throughout the Interior continue to develop. [Integrated Treatment Teams](#) are working throughout IH to embed multidisciplinary outreach to people who need flexible support that works for them. New [treatment beds](#) are coming this spring to serve youth experiencing substance use issues; access to Opioid Agonist Treatment is expanding, with the [first cohort of Interior Health's nurse prescribers](#) for Suboxone having just completed training; and access to community mental health services has improved with the launch of the [310-MHSU phone number](#).

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