



Rural Micro-Grant in Action: Expanded Peer Support

With support from West Fraser, CMHA Northern British Columbia planned and is developing a new peer support program in Quesnel, British Columbia. This peer support program will be complemented by an anti-stigma campaign and the introduction of new peer support staff.

The need

Quesnel is a small northern town, serving a large area and population. Local economic pressures, the impact of wildfires, challenges with opioid use, and low employment have led to acute mental health needs that cannot be met by existing services.

A new peer support program in Quesnel was designed as a self-help/mutual aid program, bringing people together in groups or one-on-one to support each other with mental health challenges and their recovery journeys.

The grant in action

Peer support is a supportive relationship between people who share similar experiences such as mental health, substance use, or addiction. It's rooted in mutual understanding and non-judgmental support and is effective in reducing isolation and supporting recovery.

The launch of the peer support program in Quesnel was delayed by unexpected capacity constraints in the community. Strong demand for existing mental health supports, such as direct client services, limited the time and resources available for the partnership building and community engagement needed to establish the program. This was compounded by acute community crises, including a fire that made it necessary to rebuild the local food bank that the community and CMHA Northern BC clients depended on. Rebuilding the food bank was of vital importance and pre-empted other new work in the community.

The micro-grant was used to do a needs assessment and to plan and develop the peer support program. This development included three community engagement sessions, working with local organizations and community groups, and publicizing the program through news releases, social media, and earned media, such as radio shows.

Next steps for peer support in Quesnel

CMHA Northern British Columbia is now preparing for a soft launch of one-to-one and small group support, anticipated for summer 2026, with full implementation scheduled for fall 2026. This launch will be accompanied by an anti-stigma campaign to normalize the need to seek help. CMHA Northern BC will pursue certification for peer supporters, and, pending future funding, will hire additional peer support staff.

The program will bring a community-based, peer-led model of mental health and substance-use support to Quesnel, adapted to local needs. It will emphasize connection and belonging through peer-led education, intergenerational activities, and collaboration with local partners.

Expected impact

The program has the following targets:

- **120+** one-to-one peer support meetings (average 3–5 per week over the year, ramping up from soft launch).
- **40+** peer-led group sessions (e.g., drop-in peer circles, wellness groups, shared-lunch check-ins linked with Nourish, the foodbank CMHA rebuilt).
- **60+** unique participants engaged over the first year, 40+ supported referrals for housing, food security, clinical therapy, employment programs, and various health services. This goal aligns with the 90+ referrals successfully managed by CMHA Northern BC through its existing peer support networks in other regional areas.

CMHA acknowledges the full evaluation of CMHA's West Fraser Rural Mental Health Micro-Grant Initiative: Mitri, K. & Newberry, J. (2025). From Isolation to Connection: Evaluating the Impact of the West Fraser Rural Mental Health Grant Initiative. Evaluation report submitted to the Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA]: Taylor Newberry Consulting. For more information, contact rurallandremote@cmha.ca.



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