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Theme: Perpetrator Accountability

This program provides diversion from the justice system to the mental health system for adults 18 and older and youth (12 years to 18 years) who have a mental illness and are charged with a less serious criminal offence. The service assesses people and offers assistance to identify goals and needs, links to agencies or services, and recommends charges are withdrawn if goals are met. It offers the judicial system an alternative in dealing with adults with mental illness who have been charged with a minor, low-risk crime. They now may be eligible to participate in mental health and community care, subject to referral and approval by the Crown prosecutor.

Critical Elements

- The program accepts domestic violence offenders with mental health issues, but focuses only on those with low risk offences and those who are not best served through the justice system. Focus is on reducing recidivism and improving health outcomes.
- Thorough assessment is essential. Once a person enters the service, a mental health clinician conducts a completed assessment, which includes gathering a detailed history. The person is then linked to resources specific to their needs and receives support to make positive changes (e.g., SARA).
- The program implements concurrent activities – managing risk, providing trauma-informed counselling, getting medication, addressing substance use, providing aftercare and making linkages with housing and community supports.
- There needs to be a balance between standardization and flexibility – with standardization it can become too rigid and prescriptive (one size does not fit all) and without it there are few check and balances.
- Services should be informed by the domestic violence offender typology – e.g., for an “intimate terrorist” intervention should focus on power and control, which is not necessarily the first consideration with “situational couple violence”.
- Focus on the whole family is helpful in some instances when addressing family dynamics does create better outcomes (make sure to keep victim safety in mind).
- The province is currently working on developing a diversion program specifically for domestic violence offenders with mental health issues.