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## BC SOCIAL WORKERS JOIN CALL FOR IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

(Vancouver) BC's social work association is supporting the call to strengthen safeguards in the involuntary detention and treatment of youth within the mental health system, enhance opportunities for young people to have a say in their treatment, and improve the experience and outcomes for children and youth.

Representative for Children and Youth in BC Jennifer Charlesworth examined the application of involuntary provisions of the Mental Health Act to children and youth by meeting with and understanding the lived experience of youth who had been detained under the Act. The youth, interviewed for the Representative's report that was released today, were as young as 10 years old when detained. The Representative also reviewed data from multiple stakeholders including government ministries and health authorities.

"Some protections of individual rights exist in the mental health system however these are not always made available to young people detained for mental health treatment" says Michael Crawford, President of the BC Association of Social Workers. "Young people require additional safeguards given their diminished capacity to understand and exercise their human rights."

Many of the case examples provided in the Representative's report highlight the lack of prevention and early treatment programs that might have prevented involuntary detention under the Mental Health Act. Over the last decade, children and youth involuntary admissions have risen by 162 per cent and the growth of designated treatment facilities and community resources have not kept pace.

"The strength of the Representative's report is in the attention paid to the experiences of youth detained for treatment as well as the careful and thorough review of data including the files of 116 youth" said Crawford. "For too many young people, the lack of adequate and culturally appropriate community supports, means readmission to an inpatient facility."

Recommendations made in the report include a government review of the conditions leading to increased detention of youth for treatment, better data collection to track involuntary admissions, an examination of the process of admitting children under 16 years of age, a process that ensures youth understand their rights, increased cultural safety for Indigenous youth, and changes to the way involuntary detentions are reviewed.

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Michael Crawford | President  
BC Association of Social Workers

Detained: Rights of children and youth under the Mental Health Act  
<https://rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications/detained/>