



**British Columbia
Schizophrenia Society
Provincial Office**

A Registered B.C. Non Profit Society
Business No.#11 880 1141 RR 0001

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 21, 1999, Vancouver, B.C.

The B.C. Schizophrenia Society (BCSS) urges all B.C. police forces to develop alternative methods to lethal force when dealing with psychotic patients following the shooting deaths of two people with mental illness in Vancouver and Langley.

"This is an incredibly tragic event for everyone involved and, our mental health system is certainly not meeting the needs of people with serious mental illness when police are required to be involved and tragedies such as these occur," stated Michelle Colussi, Provincial President of the BCSS.

People with serious mental illness deserve proper medical and community care to ensure that their safety and the safety of others is protected. Often when the police are called in to assist medical/community staff a person with serious mental illness is beyond reasoning with and acting in an aggressive or violent manner. This puts the police in very difficult and precarious situations that often require force to subdue and control the ill person. "The use of alternative methods of control such as the use of the Taser Gun may be one option to lethal force," stated Colussi. The Victoria Police Department is utilizing this technology currently in an attempt to reduce the need for lethal force when dealing with psychotic individuals.

"However, as our relatives and friends who are living with these serious illnesses continue to be reintegrated into society from institutions, the mental health care systems in our communities require additional staffing support to accommodate their needs and prevent the deterioration that is evidenced in both recent incidents", Colussi added. Although the provincial government has committed to a new mental health plan to be implemented over seven years at a cost of \$125 million, the funding to implement the plan is not forthcoming.

"Far too many of our relatives are dying at their own hands or the hands of the police because we do not have the necessary human and financial resources in the mental health system to ensure that people with serious mental illness receive the proper medical and community care and treatment they require," stated Colussi.

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