



BC ASSOCIATION OF
Community Response Networks
Stopping Adult Abuse and Neglect ... Together.

An Introduction to Extreme Clutter

Presented by:

Revised October 2025

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Housekeeping



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Land Acknowledgment

In this era of reconciliation, we acknowledge that the land we occupy has been populated by indigenous peoples for thousands of years before the Europeans settled here. We honor the ancestors of the past. We honor their legacy, their history and their traditions.



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About the BC CRN

- Provincial organization.
- First piloted in 1993.
- Supports development of a coordinated community response at the local level.
- Provides education, materials & resources to build awareness & prevention of abuse, neglect & self-neglect.
- Supports provincial, national & international initiatives.



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Our Mission Our Vision

Mission
To empower communities and individuals through coordination, collaboration and relationship building to stop adult abuse and neglect.


Vision
Safe communities where adults are valued, respected and free from abuse and neglect.




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BC CRN and CRNs Key Relationships




- Ministry of Health
- Public Guardian and Trustee
- CRA (Bankers, Lawyers, Aboriginal Leaders, COSCO, etc.)
- RCMP and Municipal Police
- First Responders
- Seniors First BC
- Community Gaming Grants
- Other National Organizations (NPEA, NICE, INPEA, etc.)
- Community-based Senior Services Organizations



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What is a CRN?

Community Response Networks are diverse groups of concerned individuals who work together to create a coordinated community response to adult abuse and neglect.

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Agenda

- Stories about clutter
- Definitions
- Hoarding disorder
- Rates, why and patterns
- Relationship to abuse
- Help
- Community aspects and team approaches
- What else?
- Ask for more...

Trigger Warning: This material concerns mental health conditions information that may be traumatic or may re-traumatize viewers, depending on your experience with these issues.

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Stories/Examples

- 1) John
- 2) Community

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Considerations
What do you do in a small remote rural ferry-dependent island community with virtually no services and an emerging clutter problem?



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Accumulating and Managing Possessions



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 **Clutter, Collecting, Hoarding and Squalor**



Clutter:

- Possessions are disorganized and may accumulate around living areas
- Clutter occurs most often in storage areas.

Collecting:


- Possessions are part of a larger set of organized items.
- The display is public and does not impede active living areas in the home.

Hoarding:


- Possessions become unorganized piles preventing rooms from being used for their intended purpose.
- This is private; there is excessive acquiring and distress with discarding.

Environmental Health Services - 2019

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 **Normal Clutter**


- Disorganized within storage space.
- Does not impair household / shed functioning.
- Ability to discard with only minor distress.
- Only acquires in a non-excessive way.



April's Shed

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 **Stages of Clutter**



Clutter Image Rating Scale
 Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.
(Duckworth, 1991; 2013)

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 **Other Reasons for Hoarding**
(Besides Hoarding Disorder)



Stroke
Traumatic brain injury
Dementia

• Other reasons





• Age



• Physical limitations

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 **Hoarding Disorder**





Definition:

- Excessive acquiring and inability to get rid of possessions.
- Attempts to part with items creates distress and anxiety.
- Difficulties of making decisions of what to discard (sort).
- Excessive clutter disrupts the ability to use living spaces.
- Consequent significant impairment in social, occupational or other areas.

(American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

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 **Hoarding Statistics**



Rates of Occurrence:

- 2-6% of the population have this disorder, with higher rates over the age of 60.

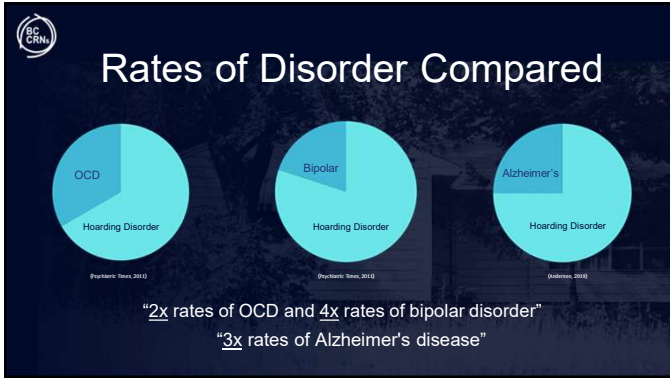
(American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Estimates of Numbers:

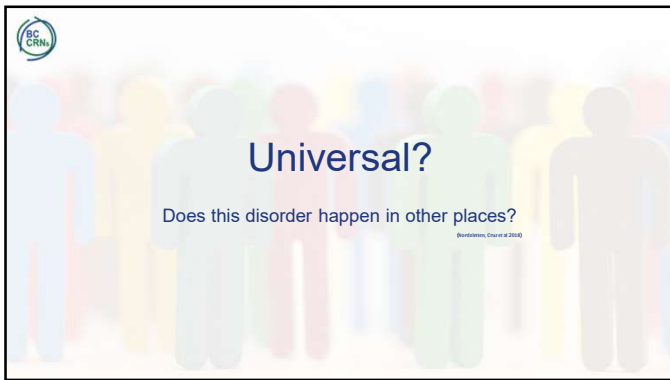
- Sunshine Coast < 600 households.
- Greater Victoria < 15,000 households.

(Anderson, 2010)

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  **Why Does Hoarding Disorder Happen?**
This has been described as an information-processing disorder in the brain - it involves different brain connections and activations. (Guth, 2013)

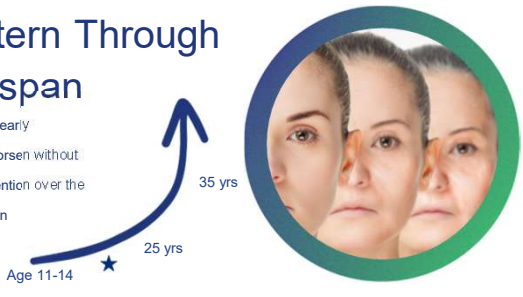
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  **Influences**
Genetics, brain function and stressful life events are being studied as contributing to hoarding behaviours.

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 **Pattern Through Lifespan**

- Starts early
- Will worsen without intervention over the lifespan



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Features of Disorder

- Individual vulnerability leads to social risk
- Other mental health vulnerabilities likely exist
 - Complexity of service provision
- Risk to aging in place



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Impact on Quality of Life

- Impaired cognitive functioning may have a significant impact on overall quality of life.
- Individuals may be:
 - Socially isolated
 - Unable to work
 - Not engaged in meaningful activity
 - Dissatisfied with their living conditions (e.g. due to difficulties with sanitation and clutter)



(Stevens et al., 2012; McCreay 2017)

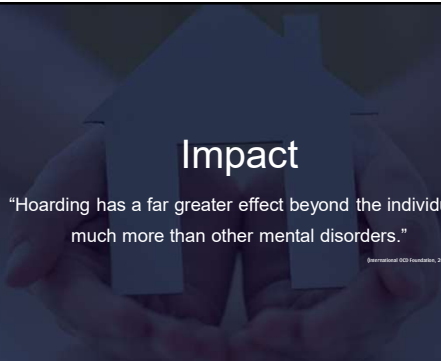
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Impact

“Hoarding has a far greater effect beyond the individual, much more than other mental disorders.”

(International OCD Foundation, 2010)



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Relationship to Abuse

Hoarding is associated with self-neglect and raises both vulnerability and the risk of abuse.

"The hoarder's control over the personal space of all who live in the home, and the extremes to which many hoarders will go in order to defend their volume of possessions may cross the line into abusive behaviour."
(Graham)

There is a relationship between trauma, adverse events, interpersonal violence and changes in relationship, loss, and onset of hoarding.
(Graham 2012, Malivo 2018)

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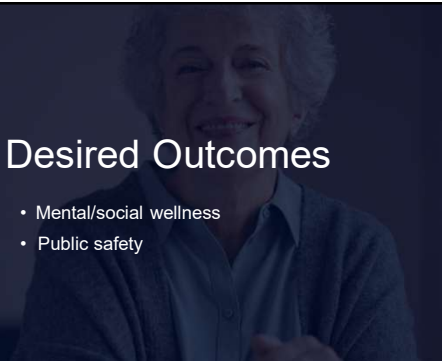
Housing Issues

Problems may arise with:

- Aging in place
- Tenancy

This is particularly critical in areas with existing housing crises.

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Two Desired Outcomes

- Mental/social wellness
- Public safety

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Helping Family Members

Learn what steps may help:

- Learn about resources
- Check language
- Referrals
- Advocacy



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A Path to Help



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Summary

Mental/emotional/cognitive wellness:

- We all need to learn non-judgmental ways to interact.
- Family and friends are the ones who most often seek help with this issue.
- Assessment is the first step towards understanding what is going on and making a plan.
- Treatment requires a number of coordinated approaches - CBT therapy, behavioral training, skills building, on going peer group support...

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 **Public Safety**

Private vulnerability becomes community/public safety issue:

- There is a longstanding relationship to clutter.
- Clutter accumulates to an unsustainable level.
- Social and other impairments are present.
- Issues build up:
 - Safety
 - Health
 - Social isolation
 - Family
 - Community
 - Housing
 - ... and more




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 **Why Pay Attention?**

- Individual daily functioning
- Neighbourhood relations
- Crises intervention
- Unsafe housing

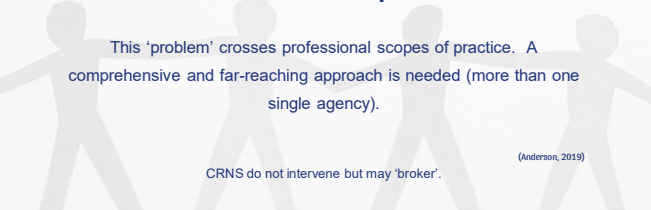


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 **Nature of Effective Responses**

This 'problem' crosses professional scopes of practice. A comprehensive and far-reaching approach is needed (more than one single agency).

CRNS do not intervene but may 'broker'. (Anderson, 2019)



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Current Approaches

Countering the effects of hoarding:

- Effective approaches:
 - Collaborative community approach/safe-guarding
 - HEAT, HART, health authorities teams
 - Combined assessment and best practices (UBC)
- Interventions and understanding at all levels:
 - Individual/ Interpersonal
 - Institutional/ Society (stigma)

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Health Authorities and Cities

Have specialized numbers, web pages, and teams who offer assessment and support.

Situations may require intervention from agencies, formal and informal, and long-term support - possibly from peer support groups.



The list on the right is of providers who **may** get involved.

This requires coordination.

Additional Team Members

- RCMP
- Fire services
- EMT/paramedic
- Adult mental health
- Adult abuse lead
- Environmental health
- Property use inspector
- Bylaw officer
- SPCA
- Non-profits
- Landlords

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Team Action

Joint casework has its own set of demands:

- Different assessment for each profession
- Communications amongst professionals must be effective

Reimer and Strickland et al. 2008

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Contact Information

[Hoarding Disorder | HealthLink BC](#)
Vancouver Coastal
 Contact VAN 311 (Vancouver). Report online.
<https://van311.ca/services/hoarding>
<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/home-action-response-team.aspx>

Island Health
 Phone: 250-361-0227 (Victoria)
 Email: heat@islandhealth.ca
 Website: www.islandhealth.ca/heat
 Other Health Authorities / Contact Mental Health Services

UBC Knowledge Exchange
<https://hoarding.psych.ubc.ca/knowledge-exchange/>

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How CRNs Can Help

- Contribute members who know how to collaborate to multi - agency approaches (outside of CRN table)
- Incubate team development until independent
- ... and more!



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Summary

Coordinated community level approach:

- It is hard to deal with this condition for both the individual and those offering support/practical help.
- The desired outcome is harm reduction and tenancy protection.
- Practical clean up/safety require a multi-agency/coordinated person-centered care approach.
- Results are not immediate.



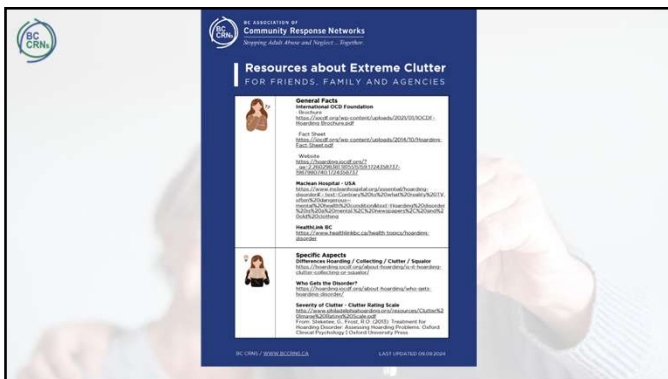
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BC Association of Community Response Networks
Support. Take Abuse and Neglect... Together.

EXTREME CLUTTER IS A SYMPTOM

Individuals and Families can follow the steps below to work on underlying issues. 4-6% of the general population have a disorder where extreme clutter happens.

- Step 1: Get an assessment from a professional.**
 First Step to understand what is going on and then figuring out a plan, starting and there are often the help seekers.
- Step 2: Find support groups and training for individuals and families.**
 Learn how important it is to interact with individuals with clutter problems.
- Step 3: Seek mental health care.**
 Seek out coordinated help, specialized cognitive behavioural therapy, behavioural training, skills building, and/or peer support.
- Step 4: Explore stress management options and other mental wellness supports.**
 In many cases such as OCD or severe other physical and mental health issues may be present. Sometimes proper medication can help with these.
- Step 5: Contact professional organizers.**
 Professional organizers who may coordinate with other services could be helpful.

Learn more at www.bccrn.ca
 An organization for the support of the home.

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Questions?

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BC Association of Community Response Networks

Thank you!

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