



Abstract

# British Columbia SHIFT: Early Lessons Learned from a Provincial Program for Countering Radicalization to Violent Extremism <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** Many existing programs for countering violent extremism focus on either end of the radicalization spectrum. On one hand are prevention programs aimed at deterring individuals from starting down the path to violent extremism. On the other hand are disengagement/de-radicalization programs designed for assisting individuals who have been fully radicalized. Conspicuously absent are programs for those who fall in-between, into what might be referred to as the pre-criminal space: individuals who have begun to exhibit signs of radicalization, but for whom radicalization is not yet complete. The British Columbia Shift (BC Shift) initiative was created to assist individuals determined to be in this pre-criminal space; that is, those deemed to be in danger of radicalizing. The goal of BC Shift is to stop individuals from traveling further down the path of radicalization, and, ideally, to turn individuals away from the path. BC Shift operates as a navigational model, connecting at-risk individuals with services and supports in the community. BC Shift is a government initiative supported by the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence. It is a civilian organization that partners very closely with, but is separate from, law enforcement. In addition to its primary CRVE mandate, BC Shift has rapidly evolved and expanded into several other responsibilities, including coordination on national CVE standards; liaising with other CVE programs across Canada; maintaining stakeholder relationships; and helping create capacity through dialog and training. Although the program only began accepting referrals in 2019, its operation has already revealed many important lessons for CRVE programs. First, it is critically important to have the right people in the room. There has to be buy-in from the highest levels of partner agencies and stakeholders, particularly early on. Second, programs of this sort should leverage existing resources wherever possible. BC Shift has been lucky enough to coordinate with situation tables, such as the CHART program in Surrey. There are already many organizations doing excellent work in their respective communities; it is very helpful to plug into those resources. Third, even though BC Shift operates as a navigational hub, it has benefitted greatly from having a social worker as part of the team. This skill set is important in helping referred individuals feel comfortable with the process of accessing services and supports. Finally, marketing matters! CRVE programs such as BC Shift have to navigate a complex reality. The very concept of violent extremism is disconcerting to a lot of people in the community; these fears have to be addressed, and difficulties related to differences in perspective and language have to be overcome. BC Shift's first year-and-a-half of operation has also highlighted several issues that have not yet been satisfactorily resolved. There is, for example, the "low hanging fruit" problem; agencies are typically referring less severe cases. Trying to get agencies to refer more serious cases has proved challenging. We hope that, by outlining these lessons and issues, this presentation proves to be useful to other CRVE initiatives.

**Keywords:** program evaluation; countering violent extremism; British Columbia; radicalization prevention programs



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