



Vancouver Island  
Crisis Society

## PRESS RELEASE

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### WHY CRISIS CHAT?

Reports show that Canadians are the heaviest users of the internet in the world - in fact they have been spending an average of 45.6 hours online per month, compared to 40.3 hours in the U.S. and an average of 24.4 hours worldwide.

Crisis lines are credited with saving the lives of thousands of people. With the growing use of computers and connecting via the internet is it possible that there is a community of people needing support who are being overlooked?

In consideration of this the Vancouver Island Crisis Line launched 'Crisis Chat' on June 3<sup>rd</sup> and as a starting point will be providing online emotional support every night from 6:00pm to 10:00pm seven days a week. Access to this service is gained by logging on to the website at [www.vicrisis.ca](http://www.vicrisis.ca) and choosing the "Chat Now" icon that will connect you to a crisis worker.

While crisis lines know how to connect to people in emotional pain and distress and do it successfully every day, there has been a growing recognition that many people in distress and pain are not reaching out to crisis lines. Anecdotal evidence from crisis centres clearly shows that younger people in particular are not calling crisis lines as much as people in older generations as they have shifted much of their communication from the telephone to electronic means such as email, texting, discussion boards, and social networking.

Online crisis services began with the Samaritans UK in 1994. According to Contact USA, centres using online emotional support have found that the services are very effective. Research in online mental health provision has documented an "online disinhibition effect" in essence a phenomenon that describes the tendency of people to open up more and say more about themselves online than they do in a phone or face-to-face interaction.

Arguments for online crisis service provision include the fact that many people who would not traditionally call crisis lines, or for that matter, access any type of mental health service, will reach out online. Chat visitors remark that it is easier to "talk" online as it seems more anonymous and feels safer. For people who don't have the confidence or verbal acuity required to ask for help in a face-to-face or verbally-based medium, online services are ideal. Chat crisis workers also remark that chat visitors also tend to disclose a lot of difficult emotional content early in a conversation, showing that chat visitors feel more comfortable in online mediums.

Crisis Chat is also able to reach certain populations that are traditionally hard to engage in face-to-face mental health care. Such people include the homebound, people with social phobias, people who have transportation difficulties or are located in remote areas and people of all ages who view asking for help with stigma and shame. These visitors often find accessing online services is an easier and preferable first step.

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