

People in Crisis Calls on the High Level Bridge

Recommendation

That the December 4, 2019, Edmonton Police Commission report CR_7338, be received for information.

Executive Summary

Significant investment has gone into reducing incidents of suicide attempts and completions at the High Level Bridge. The main deck of the High Level Bridge currently has multiple layers of intervention, including signage, help phones, and barriers. This approach is evidence-based and reflects international best practices of suicide intervention for bridges. The sole exception to this multiple layer approach is the upper (rail line) deck which is intended to be restricted to authorized personnel. The interventions preventing access to the upper deck include the locked chain-link gate and fencing at the rail line access points. The addition of further interventions to the upper deck may dissuade those contemplating suicide from choosing that location.

Analysis of data indicates that calls for service for persons in crisis come from across the city and indicate that suicide is a city-wide issue. The Edmonton Police Service, along with the City of Edmonton and health care and community partners, is committed to suicide prevention through the implementation of Living Hope: A Community Plan to Prevent Suicide in Edmonton. Living Hope places a strong focus on evidence-based suicide prevention actions, which decrease risk factors and strengthen protective factors to support those struggling with their mental wellness in the community so they do not engage in suicidal behaviour.

Report

Best Practice Interventions

Research shows there are three key interventions that deter and decrease suicide attempts and deaths from bridges. Each intervention acts as a support to the other when present together.

Means restriction - by designing bridge infrastructure to reduce access or availability to means and methods of suicide (i.e. barriers, nets, fencing)

Encourage help-seeking behavior - by providing access to crisis assistance via signage and crisis phones

Increase the likelihood of an intervention by a third party - by optimizing the possibility of a person unrelated to the crisis arriving at the location and intervening

Current State High Level Bridge Interventions

The main deck of the High Level Bridge incorporates all of the above interventions. The bridge includes a barrier spanning the entire length as well as signage and crisis phones at all entry points. The bridge also sees high levels of vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic daily thereby increasing the opportunity for third party individuals to alert emergency services of people in crisis.

In contrast, the only intervention on the upper deck (rail line), which is not an open or permissible access area for pedestrians, is the chain link fencing at either end of the bridge with access points for authorized personnel. The upper deck does not possess any crisis aid signage or direct connection help phones and the gate barring access stands as the sole element of means restriction. If the gate and fence are circumvented, the only remaining intervention is the possibility of a third party on the main deck observing someone on the top deck and alerting emergency services. This is an indirect intervention and has a lower probability of effectiveness than those employed on the main deck. Additional upper deck infrastructure interventions may dissuade those contemplating suicide from attending that location.

Calls for Service and First Responder Access

Analysis of police data indicates the High Level Bridge is one of many locations in the city that police respond to assist individuals in crisis. Calls for service show a decrease to people in crisis on the High Level Bridge which can, in part, be attributed to the increased interventions installed on the main deck of the bridge. Edmonton Police Services recently conducted an assessment of the bridge and identified a lack of access to the upper deck as an issue for first responders. To address this, the Edmonton Police Service has worked with the Edmonton Rail Society to install a lockbox on the bridge to house a key that allows access for first responders to secure areas to assist, rescue, or locate persons in crisis.

A Preventative Community Based Response

An analysis of Edmonton Police Service data demonstrates there are people in crisis throughout Edmonton. Given this, intervention measures at the High Level Bridge are only one type of response needed to prevent suicide in Edmonton. The City of Edmonton and Edmonton Police Service, along with partners from health care and the community, are engaged in multi-faceted public health approach to suicide prevention as outlined in Living Hope: A Community Plan to Prevent Suicide in Edmonton. This strategy, which is built on a collaborative and coordinated community wide response, is currently in the implementation phase. Actions in the plan are intended to:

- enhance awareness and education
- increase accessibility to the full continuum of services
- address the needs of higher risk populations

As one of the partners in this response, the Edmonton Police Service is fully committed to supporting the implementation of Living Hope to reduce risk factors and strengthen protective factors that will not only reduce suicides at the High Level Bridge but in all communities.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton is a safe city.			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater access to upstream mental health supports and crisis intervention improving coping skills for those struggling in the community. • High Level Bridge is not linked to suicide as a prevalent means including portrayal of that location in the media • Reduced liability for the City 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for service responded to by police in relation to mental health/suicidal crisis citywide • Specific reduction in calls for service in relation to suicide attempts or deaths at the High Level Bridge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved mental wellness for all Edmontonians • Earlier intervention in pre-crisis phase • Reduction from the 2018 amount of 8431 calls for service to police in relation to mental health/suicidal crisis • Reduction from the 2018 value of 40 High Level Bridge specific calls for service to police in relation to suicide attempts or deaths • Reduction from the 2018 value of 2329 mental health apprehensions by police citywide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upstream prevention targets tied to implementation plan of Living Hope (2018-2021) • High Level Bridge targets tied to implementation of recommendations • 15% reduction of police dispatch calls related to mental health crisis/suicide