



REPORT TO CALGARY POLICE COMMISSION



Operation CERTainty Evaluation Report

ISC: ☒ Unclassified ☐ Protected A ☐ Protected B

Date | 2025 Sept 16

Submitted for

☒ Information only ☐ Discussion ☐ Decision / Approval

Type of Meeting

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Executive Committee | ☒ Commission Regular Meeting |
| ☐ Finance, Audit, & Infrastructure Committee | ☒ Public Session |
| ☐ Police Personnel & Culture Committee | ☐ In-camera with CPS |
| ☐ Policing Services Committee | |
| ☐ Workplace Review Steering Committee | |

Reason for Report

- ☒ Obligation under the *Police Act* or *Police Service Regulation*
☐ Obligation under Commission Policy
☒ Report on program and/or update on progress
☐ Response to Motion or Commission Inquiry
☐ Other:

The following report provides an overview of the Safer Calgary Operation CERTainty that focused on downtown safety.

Recommendations

Please accept this report and presentation for your situational awareness and advocacy opportunity.

Background / Analysis / Considerations / Advocacy

Operation CERTainty was a tri-agency deployment that ran from February 16-April 13, 2025, with the objective to enhance public safety in and around the downtown core and on transit.

The evaluation of the deployment to hot spot areas in the downtown core and surrounding areas by the Calgary Police Community Engagement Response Teams (CERT), Transit Public Safety (TPS), and Calgary Community Standards, internally referred to as Operation CERTainty, and publicly as Safer Calgary, has been measured in outputs and outcomes.

- Outputs include the number of calls attended, charges laid, warrants executed, summons issued, etc.
- Outcomes encompass the impact on crime and social disorder trends, impact survey of officers who participated, and a perception survey conducted by the Calgary Downtown Association (CDA), Business Owners Management Association (BOMA) and the Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC).

Operational challenges with mitigation strategies were identified, with recommendations for improved future deployments to improve downtown safety .

Attachments (if any)

1. Operational Evaluation of Operation CERTainty-Executive Summary/Report
2. Operation CERTainty PowerPoint

Approval signatures

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2025 09 16

Tamara Daku, Manager

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EXECUTIVE SPONSOR signature:

Name, Rank/Position

Date

Work Area (Unit, Section, Bureau)

CHIEF OF POLICE signature:



2025-09-17

Date



OPERATIONAL EVALUATION

OPERATION CERTainty

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTERNAL REPORT: ISC: UNCLASSIFIED

June 6, 2025

Charge Outcomes Updated: September 12, 2025

Rebecca HANNA, CERT Analyst

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Community Policing Analytical Unit



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Operation CERTainty Mission Statement

Enhance public safety in and around the downtown core and other identified hot spot areas through targeted enforcement, strategic patrols, and compassionate supports to reduce social disorder and minimize criminal behavior, including fentanyl and other drug trafficking and consumption in public spaces and on transit.

The evaluation of the deployment to hot spot areas in the downtown core and surrounding areas by the Calgary Police Community Engagement Response Teams (CERT), Transit Public Safety (TPS), and Calgary Community Standards, internally referred to as Operation CERTainty, and publicly as Safer Calgary, has been measured in outputs and outcomes.

- Outputs include the number of calls attended, charges laid, warrants executed, summons issued, etc.
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Multi-agency operations are often difficult to evaluate due to a variety of factors. There was an increase in uniformed presence from all three agencies downtown and other identified hot spot areas. To keep the public informed regarding efforts to address crime and social disorder, the CPS shared information and statistics from the Safer Calgary initiative through traditional and social media.

Respondents from the business community noted an increase in uniform presence as a key factor in perception of safety. Statistical analysis indicates that while the operation had a temporary impact within deployment hotspot areas, the percentage of public-generated disorder calls for service increased on both Stephen Avenue and in The CORE during the operation. This could be due to displacement, seasonal fluctuations due to warmer temperatures, and the closing of Olympic Plaza, reinforcing that enforcement is not the only solution, and it is critical that there are underlying supports to address roots of homelessness and addictions.

There were 3478 calls for service generated, 2,480 warrants executed, 1967 summonses issued, and 66 CDSA 4(1) charges laid (simple possession). This was supplemented by a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) operation for eight days targeting LRT and geographic hotspots, resulting in 175 criminal charges laid on 28 individuals.

Top calls for service downtown continue to be unwanted guest, disturbance, and suspicious person calls that are typically non-criminal in nature. *Open air drug consumption is the reason most cited for behavior that requires the removal of individuals.* While this is a criminal offence, the enforcement of CDSA 4(1) is not supported by the courts limiting the abilities of law enforcement action. Similar issues were identified by the survey to downtown businesses, with the sentiment that there is a need for additional social sector resources, with places for vulnerable individuals to go, and resources beyond a police response.

While members assigned to the operation made over 2,000 referrals to social serving agencies, it became apparent through the survey that not all agencies have the resources or training necessary to support the needs of the population being served. Key challenges remain to improve safety in the downtown core:

- Open air drug consumption
- Limiting authorities for enforcement, and
- Day space accessibility to the vulnerable seven days a week.

A sustainable model of enforcement amongst the three agencies and visible uniformed presence are required to continue to improve the perception of safety in the downtown core, coupled with the ability to truly impact open air drug consumption through an updated bylaw.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESPONSE TEAM

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CERTainty Statistics – February 16, 2025 – April 13, 2025

CALLS ATTENDED	REPORTS	INFO POSTS	BUSINESS CONTACTS	SOCIAL AGENCY REFERRALS	ARREST WARRANTS	SUMMONS	CHARGES LAID
							
Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
3,478	235	228	2,062	2,197	2,480	1,967	373

Impact of Deployment

- ❖ 3478 calls for service were attended with approximately 75% proactively officer generated. Proactive officer presence in the area:
 - Reduced the number of times businesses had to call police
 - Decreased response times for certain calls allowing CPS and TPS members to apprehend offenders immediately
- ❖ 66 CDSA 4(1) charges were laid,
 - Resulted in 3 Guilty plea, 8 Stay of Proceedings, and 26 charges withdrawn by the Crown.
 - 29 charges remain active.
- ❖ 38 undercover drug buys were completed by DUST during the HIDTA, with 175 CDSA and criminal code charges laid on 28 individuals.
At time of their arrest:
 - 79% possessed criminal records
 - 97% had previously been charged with CDSA 5(1) (trafficking)
 - 72% had previously been charged with CDSA 5(2) (possession for the purpose)
 - 97% had other charges before the courts at the time of arrest.
- ❖ There were 2118 public generated disorder calls for service in the operational deployment communities (Chinatown, Downtown Commercial Core, East Village and Downtown West End).
 - This was 37% higher than the same date range in 2024.
- ❖ Comparatively, there were 1478 officer generated calls for service in the disorder category during the operation
 - This was a 90% increase from the same time frame in 2024.
- ❖ Simultaneously, Community Resource Officers (CRO) were actively engaging with businesses in the same communities, encouraging reporting about issues they were facing.
 - 123 business contacts made translating into an increase in public calls for service during the operation.

Collaboration and increased information sharing between the three agencies provided increased awareness of emerging disorder or public safety issues, increased officer safety and improved co-deployment.

Public Education Campaign

To keep the public informed regarding efforts to address crime and social disorder in public spaces, the CPS shared information and statistics from the Safer Calgary initiative through traditional and social media.

The public campaign included:

- A presentation about the operation in the public session of the Calgary Police Commission on Wednesday, March 26, 2025, including statistics and highlights



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- A one-month update media scrum and [news release](#), featuring spokespeople from the CPS, Transit Public Safety and Calgary Community Safety sharing information of about the operation to date, including statistics and anecdotal highlights
- Weekly statistical and anecdotal updates throughout the pilot were shared on the CPS social media channels (Facebook, X, Instagram, Threads), and a real-time look into the operation was provided through a social media post-along on March 5, 2025.
 - Total posts: 59
 - Total impressions: 840,519
 - Total engagements (likes, comments, reactions, shares, etc.): 4,196
 - Total link clicks (where links were provided): 95
 - Engagement Rate¹: 5.16%

Survey of Participating CPS, TPS, and CCS Members

A survey was issued to 110 participating members of three agencies. 63 responses were received from:

- 24 Transit Public Safety Members,
- 7 Calgary Community Standards members,
- 32 Calgary Police members.

Results:

- 50% of all respondents felt that the operation had a positive or neutral impact on the public perception of safety.
- 30% of respondents believed that they professionally or personally benefitted from the operation.
- 37% of respondents agreed that working interoperably with the three agencies was beneficial.

Perception Survey by the Calgary Downtown Association (CDA), Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), and Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC)

A post operation survey was conducted to measure impacts to the perception of safety of downtown businesses. 190 participants responded. The following themes were captured:

- Though some respondents felt safer due to increased officer presence, 82% of respondents reported their overall perception of safety was unchanged.
 - 61% reported they did not see increased officer presence downtown, but
 - 93% are in support of seeing increased uniformed presence.
- When asked who they report incidents to²: 54% report to police, 59% report to building security, 19% state they do not report incidents they see, 17% stated they report to 311 and 5% report incidents to 211.
- Persistent issues with open drug use, social disorder, and homelessness were frequently cited as reasons for unchanged or worsened perceptions of safety.
- Increased aggressivity of individuals causing public disturbances, coupled with mental health crises continue to affect their perception of safety.
- Several respondents emphasized the negative impact of social disorder on businesses and daily life, increased security costs, and growing volume of security related incidents that at times were a threat to their safety.

¹ Industry standard average for governments across channels is about 2.4% - according to Hootsuite report measurements in January 2025

² Survey respondents were asked to select all that apply.



- Respondents emphasized that while increased presence provided a sense of safety and comfort, it merely displaced problems, moving them from one area to another without addressing the root causes.

Quotes from the Business Community

"We absolutely need more police present downtown. We also need police to be able to act on the drug use. Calgarians are tired of not being able to enjoy the downtown core due to open drug use and disturbing behaviour." – Calgary Business

"This just moved the problem around. Until something is done to address drug activity and social disorder the concerns will continue." – Calgary Business

"The city needs resources to help people get clean and get back into society. Moving them out of the view of the public does not solve the issues that people desperately need. The police need more funding, social programs need more funding." – Calgary Business

Operational Challenges Identified and Mitigation Strategies

1. Authorities for Enforcement Partners

- Each agency has specific authorities defining their duties, which posed challenges during the operation.
 - TPS members were unable to transport drugs or lay charges under the CDSA, nor charge under the Criminal Code unless it was an on-view incident.
 - CCS members have no authority to act under drug related offences, are unable to execute warrants, and could not serve summonses under the Trespass to Premises Act.
 - CPS authorities are all encompassing (Bylaw, Provincial Acts, and criminal violation authority)

Mitigation Strategy: Leverage each agencies authorities to tackle issues with the right resource at the right time. Seek continued advocacy on increasing authorities for Peace Officer partners as a force multiplier to reduce crime and disorder in public spaces and on Transit.

2. Support for CDSA Charges

- CDSA 4(1) (simple possession) charges were supported by PPSC Crown during Operation CERTainty, however though 66 charges were laid, 26 have been withdrawn, 8 stayed and 29 remain active. Only 3 resulted in a guilty plea to date.
- CDSA 5(2) (trafficking) charges where vulnerable are being victimized by traffickers are more readily supported, however, the vulnerable community is attuned to newcomers downtown which is challenging for undercover drug operations.
- Open-air drug consumption continues to drive disorderly behaviour and public calls for service for the removal of unwanted guests. Post operational surveys identified open-air consumption as an activity that makes the public feel unsafe in public spaces, particularly downtown.

Mitigation Strategy: Ongoing commitment from both Crown and Justice of the Peace officials in honoring CDSA charges and prosecution is required to effectively improve public safety in downtown and public spaces.

3. Day Spaces with programming and social agency accessibility.

- Unwanted guest complaints to remove vulnerable congregating, consuming drugs, causing disturbances in front of businesses, high traffic pedestrian zones, or building entryways are high.
- Hotspots are in proximity to fast food restaurants, convenience stores, public malls, libraries, or green spaces that have washrooms, shelter from inclement weather, and/or extended service hours.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESPONSE TEAM

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- All enforcement members identified that when requested to move vulnerable individuals, they are often asked “where else can I go?” or “where do you want me to be?”
- Day spaces where the vulnerable can safely congregate, with access to services, meals, and programming are required to reduce the volume downtown. There is a reticence from the community to attend existing shelters in the core for safety reasons and inability to consume drugs.

Mitigation Strategy: Creating “safe” day spaces for vulnerable persons that are open 7 days a week with appropriate supports beyond business hours. Re-introducing TV/library spaces, woodworking programs/activities, and places to rest or use washroom and shower facilities would be an asset.

4. Reducing barriers to Judicial Processes and Restorative Justice

- CERT identified there was a significant barrier for vulnerable and other individuals to attend Westwind’s for fingerprinting.
- CPS Ident Unit confirmed that approximately 72% of individuals fail to attend their fingerprint date resulting in warrants being issued. Each warrant takes on average 3 hours of CPS resource time to issue, track, and execute each warrant. IDENT identified there were close to 5,000 Fail to Attend Ident warrants on the system.

Mitigation Strategy: CPS Officers were advised to set Wednesday dates for court appearances and fingerprinting on the same day. IDENT was scheduled to attend the courthouse to fingerprint and execute DNA orders during this time. (NOTE: Positive results were seen with the pilot implementation within a short period of time. 36 individuals were fingerprinted, 5 DNA orders executed saving 123 hours of officer time).

5. Radio and Communication Difficulties

- TPS members are on their own radio channel through the PS100 communication center.
- CCS members were on CPS radios during Operation CERTainty, but were removed May 31st, 2025, due to RCMP CPIC compliance policy. They now have their own radio channel via C911.
- Lack of a centralized dispatch model with access to all three agencies calls, priorities, and information makes coordination challenging. Calgary 911 dispatch found it challenging and overwhelming to have a resource heavy operation running on a CPS patrol channel.

Mitigation Strategy: A dedicated mutual aid operational channel and dispatcher for future deployments requiring the three agencies. While there are challenges due to CPIC compliance, continued advocacy to bring all agencies onto a single radio for improved officer safety and communication is essential.

6. Prisoner Transport

- Calls involving a custody situation translated into the loss of one or two uniformed members for several hours due to the distance travelling to arrest processing. There is a need to assign prisoner escort duties to an alternative resource so that CPS and peace officers can maintain consistent focus on providing service downtown, on Transit and in public spaces.
- **Mitigation Strategy:** Consideration of an alternative enforcement entity or the Sheriffs for prisoner transport is required.

7. Centralized Command for a Decentralized Model

- A SSgt. position was identified to be critical to coordinate nine decentralized CERT, TPS and CCS teams for downtown and transit deployments, while ensuring 7 day a week coverage of the city.
- A team Sgt. was deemed necessary to deploy with their respective teams for adequate command and control. Both downtown CERT share one Sgt. making it impossible to be out with both teams at the same time.



- Each CERT and agency team were on different shift schedules which proved challenging for consistent downtown and transit hotspot coverage 7 days a week.

Mitigation Strategy: *An acting Staff Sergeant was seconded to command the operation which proved to be an immense asset. A second sergeant position is recommended due to the schedule separation of the two downtown CERT, and lack of supervision over half of the weekly deployments. This would allow for 7 day a week coverage for both teams with supervisory support. CERTs have committed to a schedule change to satisfy seven day a week coverage requirement. TPS and Bylaw members have schedule requirements that reflect their agency priorities. A consistent deployment schedule amongst all agencies would be beneficial.*

9. Limited analytical capacity

- One CPS crime analyst currently supports nine CERTs, encampment team, and High System User Coordinators which is an unmanageable workload. The addition of TPS and CCS to Operation CERTainty led to an unsustainable workload for the duration of the operation. A temporary analytical support position was assigned to assist the lone analyst in providing daily deployment hotspots, identify HSU's for offender management, collate agency inputs, while producing twice weekly operational reports for all agencies. CAD and Records Management Systems (RMS) are not integrated necessitating the need to manually collate end of shift summaries for analysis.

Mitigation Strategy: *Additional analytical resources are required to support CERT, HSU, and encampment members for a manageable daily workload. In addition, for future co-agency deployments, dedicated analytical resources from each agency should be added to collate from each agencies individual data sets, to be shared collectively.*

10. Balancing High System User Coordinator Workload and Shift Schedules

- HSU Coordinators followed the same shift schedule of their CERT during the operation which included evening hours. This proved challenging when meeting with HSUs and social support partners who are only available during day hours. There is a disproportionate volume of HSU clients downtown resulting in a disproportionate caseload for the downtown HSU Coordinator.

Mitigation Strategy: *The addition of a centralized HSU sergeant to manage the decentralized HSU coordinators on a different shift schedule, would provide a more structured, coordinated team with balanced workloads to manage HSU in obtaining supports to reduce interactions with law enforcement, peace officers and the public.*

11. Social/Health Sector Resources

- Responding to the needs of the vulnerable "in the moment" was found most effective connecting individuals with important medical treatment and support. Referrals, transportation assistance to social agencies, housing appointments, obtaining identification to access medical prescriptions, health care and mental health supports, addiction and detox support are all necessary to reduce HSU interactions, and improve perceptions of safety. Most services are currently located downtown where many clients are not comfortable going, require assistance to access, and are only open during business hours.

Alberta Recovery Clinicians

- Success has been realized with two embedded Recovery Alberta Clinicians in downtown CERT, however they are currently limited by their inability to deploy with other CERT or outside the boundaries of downtown.



Alpha House Outreach/Community Outreach Team (COT)

- Alpha House outreach workers have been successful in proactively connecting vulnerable experiencing homelessness or addiction on Transit to supports in the moment wherever they feel most comfortable. There is a need for additional COT teams or Alpha House HELP members to deploy with CERT.

Indigenous Outreach

- There is a disproportionate representation of the Indigenous population in the vulnerable and shelter sector downtown. Appropriate social supports for Indigenous was identified to be a gap in CERT for “in the moment” contacts in the community.

Navigation Center – Alberta Health and Identification

- *Obtaining personal identification is a key barrier for the vulnerable in accessing health and medical services. Demand is surpassing the capacity of the Navigation Center, which currently processes 30 persons per day, with a waiting list forming daily.*

Mitigation Strategy: Advocacy for additional Recovery Alberta clinicians, Alpha House Social Navigators, an Indigenous Outreach worker, or Community Paramedic to each CERT shift schedule (two-day shift/two evening shift) could improve outcomes for individuals. Advocacy to doubling the capacity for Identification services at the Navigation Center is required.

12. Transitional Housing Shortage

- HSU clients advise they feel overwhelmed when housed after an extended time on the streets and require a transition program with supports to overcome the sudden change. There is a need for increased transitional housing to set individuals up for success.

Mitigation Strategy: Advocacy with social partners is required to improve access to transitional housing and supports.

Advocacy Recommendations

1. Addressing Open -Air Drug Use with Enhanced Bylaw Authorities

- Calgary EMCS and TPS officers do not have CDSA authorities or ability to transport drugs, and there is reticence to prosecute CDSA 4(1) charges involving vulnerable populations.
- Redirecting certain individuals to Community Court to deal with bylaw matters is likely to have better outcomes than criminal enforcement.

Smoking and Vaping Bylaw/Public Behaviour Bylaw 23M2018

- Revising this bylaw would provide all agencies the authority to enforce open air drug consumption and address unacceptable behaviours

2. Day Spaces Outside the Downtown Core

- 7 Days/Week With Extended hours

3. Expansion of the Restorative Justice Unit pilot for fingerprinting at court.

- The provision of weekly “in-house” Calgary Court Center fingerprinting and collaboration with Community Court was beneficial in preventing Fail to Attend warrants being issued.
- Recommend continuation and expansion to allow all CPS members to send vulnerable persons to this court / fingerprint date.



4. *Expansion of Alberta Identification services at the Navigation Center*
5. *Additional Recovery Alberta Clinicians, Alpha House Outreach, Indigenous Outreach embedded in CERT*
6. *Transitional Housing and Supports.*
7. *Mutual Aid Channel for CPS and Partner Agencies*
8. *Alternative Prisoner Transport*
9. *Centralized Command for CERT (Growth)*
 - *CERT SSgt for the nine decentralized CERT Teams.*
 - *CERT Sergeant for the second Downtown CERT Team*
10. *Additional Analytical Resources (Growth)*
 - *CERT Strategic Operational Analyst*
 - evaluate deployments for effectiveness, monitor and map disorder and HSU displacement over time, identify strategic crime reduction priorities, emerging themes
 - *CERT HSU Analyst Technician*
 - support the CERT crime analyst identifying high system users, supporting HSU Coordinators, offender management, and regular reporting needs.

The Way Forward/Sustainability

CERT has recognized that to move forward and be more effective in the future, a centralized leadership team is critical. This is needed to ensure consistent deployment, allow CERT teams to be shifted as needed to address emerging hot spots, and enable CERT to be a good partner in working with agencies like Transit Public Safety and Calgary Community Standards.

Consistency is key and it is essential for the way forward. There will now be four CERT teams working each day, seven days per week, allowing consistent deployment to disorder and crime hot spots and identified problem locations across the city. This will also allow for ongoing efforts to address localized district priorities.