

**Letter to the Editor  
Vancouver Sun  
March 30, 2015**

The recent series investigating the use of deadly force by police personnel in British Columbia highlights some of the significant challenges faced by law enforcement on a daily basis, but I believe the unfortunate use of these tragic events to drive a wedge between our officers and the communities they police paints a distorted picture, and does a disservice to the officers that are thrust into these situations.

The fact is that, as Public Safety Canada has reported, police use force in only 2% of their interactions with the public, which speaks to the extensive training our officers receive in communications and de-escalation techniques. Despite that number, officers are regularly called on to respond to difficult situations that require split-second decisions, where innocent lives are in jeopardy, and many factors need to be taken into account.

It can be easy, in retrospect, to claim that someone was “only armed with a 2X4,” or other implement, to suggest lethal force was not required, however a quick look through any police service’s exhibit locker will show a variety of usually benign everyday items that became deadly weapons in the wrong hands, and are waiting to be displayed as part of a homicide trial.

Unfortunately, when mental health illness is also a factor in a critical incident, the public can be quick to judge the actions of law enforcement. The problem in these particular circumstances is often that we ignore the root causes of these incidents, and fail to ask why the system itself has failed these individuals. Why are they often not receiving the necessary and appropriate care in these circumstances, and why are the resources for persons with mental health issues not being properly targeted and delivered?

Police services across Canada are working with mental health professionals to adopt strategies to mitigate the risk of tragic outcomes in these circumstances, but significant roadblocks, such as the sharing of information between the health care system and law enforcement, often hinder these efforts. Our front-line personnel are regularly asked to react in situations where they only possess, and are only allowed to possess, parts of the story, and it is a testament to their professionalism that the overwhelming majority of these scenarios are resolved peacefully for all involved.

Your series, which highlights a small number of tragic and unfortunate incidents threatens to question the actions of all the professional men and women who serve as members of the Vancouver Police Department, and across British Columbia. Our members show compassion and care for their communities on a daily basis, while coping with chronic staffing shortages and an ever-changing and challenging police environment, and ignoring that context is not in the public interest, and could potentially undermine public confidence in our efforts.

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