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Province bolsters opioid action plan to save lives

Alberta is implementing a range of new tools to address overdoses and deaths related to fentanyl and other opioids.

This action complements more than \$7 million already invested this year in new addictions treatment programming and recovery beds.

The new measures are:

- Improving the collection and publishing of data to better target interventions
- Expanding access to opioid replacement therapy
- Funding several community agencies working to establish supervised consumption sites
- Improving prescription drug monitoring and implementing new tools to prevent prescription drug misuse in partnership with the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta

“These new measures will make a difference for families who need help for loved ones struggling with addiction. We are working closely with our community partners and affected families to ensure we are making the right investments. Together, everyone in Alberta needs to be part of the conversation on how we treat and support people living with addiction.”

- Brandy Payne, Associate Minister of Health

The latest information on fentanyl-related deaths in Alberta indicates 47 people died during the third quarter of 2016. That compares to 81 during the previous three-month period and 66 in the third quarter of 2015. As of September 30, 2016, 193 people died of apparent drug overdoses related to fentanyl in Alberta this year. That compares with 205 fentanyl-related deaths during the same period in 2015.

The province is asking the Chief Medical Officer of Health to take action to further expand access to harm reduction services, especially opioid replacement therapy. In Alberta, 65 physicians are licensed to provide methadone and approximately 160 are licensed to provide suboxone for people with opioid dependency. Over the next few weeks, AHS Opioid Dependency Program clinics in Edmonton and Calgary will identify stable clients and connect them to a physician for ongoing treatment.

“Evidence supports harm reduction strategies as an effective way to address opioid misuse. We can increase Albertans’ access to opioid replacement therapy by strengthening supports for primary care physicians and Primary Care Networks to provide this care. And by working with community organizations like AMSISE, we will better understand how supervised consumption services might fit in our overall harm reduction strategy.”

- Dr. Karen Grimsrud, Chief Medical Officer of Health

"This is another positive step towards harm reduction for patients and we applaud the government's actions."

- Dr. Trevor Theman, College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta

Given that harm reduction saves lives, the province is allocating funding to explore the need for supervised consumption services in Alberta. These health services are shown to prevent overdose deaths and improve access to medical and social supports to vulnerable people and are not found to increase drug use and criminal activity.

A \$230,000 grant to Access to Medically Supervised Injection Services Edmonton (AMSISE) will support the community engagement process and the development of a proposal to initiate the

federal application process. A \$500,000 grant will allow other Alberta communities where needle exchange programs are in place to assess their need for supervised consumption services.

“We appreciate the support from Alberta Health to take the next step in our planning. Our coalition of organizations and individuals recognize the need and value in adding supervised consumption services in Edmonton. This is an evidence-based practice adding to the spectrum of prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services.”

- Shelley Williams, Access to Medically Supervised Injection Services Edmonton

"Our son, Danny, might still be alive had there been a supervised consumption service. He was alone that day and did not know it was fentanyl. As a mother, my definition of harm reduction is keeping a person alive so they can make a better decision on another day."

- Petra Schulz, AMSISE member and parent advocate

“Like our partners in government and the private sector, we continue to work to provide treatment for those addicted to fentanyl and other opioids while focusing efforts on understanding and addressing the root causes of the issue.”

- Barry Andres, Executive Director, Provincial Addiction and Mental Health, Alberta Health Services

Actions to date:

- Investing \$3 million for new opioid dependency treatment spaces, providing treatment for an additional 240 patients.
- Investing more than \$4.5 million in new addiction treatment beds, with the province opening nearly 50 detoxification beds since February.
- Quadrupling the number of naloxone kits to 13,000 from 3,000. As of Sept. 30, over 6,400

naloxone kits have been given to Albertans. These kits have been used 472 times. The kits are being distributed through 895 registered sites, including local pharmacies.

- Asking the federal government to restrict chemicals used to make fentanyl under the Controlled Drugs and Substance Act, which Health Canada has committed to act on quickly.
- Investing an additional \$2.6 million in Alberta Law Enforcement Response Teams (ALERT), bringing the province's total investment to \$29.1 million.
- Providing Proceeds of Crime grants totalling \$220,000 to police and their community partners to raise awareness of the dangers of fentanyl and other drugs.

Related information

[Fentanyl and opioid dependency treatment](#)

[Alberta's fentanyl response and take-home naloxone program](#)

[Q3 Opioid misuse report](#)

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