

Moving Forward

Progress Report on Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps



Report on progress and plans after one year of implementing actions in Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps

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Introduction

In June 2015, Premier Notley appointed the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee to review the addiction and mental health system in Alberta. The committee released *Valuing Mental Health: Report of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee* in February 2016 outlining 32 recommendations. In June 2017, the Government of Alberta released *Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps*, which outlines 18 actions for government to take to respond to the 32 recommendations. This progress report outlines the steps taken on the 18 actions, the achievements so far, and the next steps.

Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps and the progress on the 18 actions are a critical part of achieving Alberta Health's vision for community-based care – that Albertans receive the right care, at the right time, in the right place. By focusing efforts on better connecting and coordinating addiction and mental health services within health, and between health and community programs, Albertans are able to find the services they need, when they need them, in their home community.

Over 150 initiatives are now underway. These initiatives, address the 18 *Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps* actions and fall into four **Areas of Action**:

- **Coordinate and connect services** across health and between health and community services, so people can find the services they need when they need them,
- **Enhance the role of primary health care** so they can better support people with addiction and mental health issues and connect them to the care they need,
- **Focus on earlier supports** to help prevent people from developing addiction and mental health issues and decreasing the need for more intensive services, and
- **Develop legislation and standards** to ensure that services provide safe, quality care and consumer protections.

Most importantly, these actions will focus on the needs of **priority populations** who have been underserved:

- **Children, youth and families:** Almost 50 per cent of young people in hospital are there for a mental health issue. Good mental health in childhood lays the foundation for good mental health throughout life.
- **People with addictions:** About one in ten Albertans reports drinking to a level considered harmful or hazardous. Many Albertans with addictions need support to address their health and mental health needs, especially during the ongoing opioid crisis.
- **People with multiple and complex needs:** They need help from many different professionals in many service sectors, so access to coordinated services is critical.
- **Indigenous Peoples and communities:** While most Indigenous Peoples lead healthy lives, rates of substance use, addiction and suicide are reportedly higher among Indigenous Peoples than in the general population.

For each of these groups, the biggest challenge is *connecting them to the services they need*, regardless of who they are, where they live or how much they know about the addiction and mental health system.

Over the last year, there has been significant work to improve supports and services for these priority populations. **This progress report highlights some of those achievements and the progress on the commitment to improve the addiction and mental health system in Alberta.**

The vision for Alberta's mental health system: Sam's Story

Imagine 13-year-old Sam. He and his family are recent immigrants to Alberta and live in a rural community. Sam's teacher told his parents that Sam seems to be struggling with anxiety that is leading to angry outbursts and a hard time making friends. Through the Mental Health Capacity Building program at Sam's school, Sam's Wellness Coach suggests that his parents call 211. When they call they talk to the 211 information and referral specialist, who knows all about services in their own community. Sam has his own questions so he live chats with a youth peer worker through an app.

Sam and his parents decide to go to their local Youth Service Hub, which is operated by the Primary Care Network (PCN). Sam and his parents build an electronic care plan with the Hub's case manager and other service providers that work with the Hub.

Following the care plan, Sam meets new friends in a support group and talks to a doctor about how he has been feeling. The doctor connects his parents to a mental health social worker in the PCN, who helps them to better understand the impact relocating to Alberta has had on Sam's, and even their own, mental health. The mental health social worker suggested that Sam's parents take Mental Health First Aid: Adults Who Interact with Youth Training offered at the Hub.

There are times when Sam needs more than what they can provide at the Hub or in the PCN. When that happens, the PCN finds the right service and helps Sam and his family get into the Alberta Health Services hospital or community program he needs. Sam's PCN doctor and his parents get the information they need to support his recovery when he returns home. Sam and his family know how to get the help they need from mental health and addiction providers in their community, and that the services are all safe and provided by qualified staff. They also know that their experiences matter because service providers ask them if they have concerns, and they can see services change to respond to their needs. Sam and his family still have challenges, but they know that they will be able to get the right help, from the right people, in their community when they need it.

Achievement Highlights

The government has been working closely with addiction and mental health professionals and organizations, Indigenous Peoples, and communities to improve services and supports. Highlighted below are some of the achievements. For more information and further details, see Appendix 1.

Act in partnership: create an integrated system

The activities in this section below highlight the work underway to improve coordination of services between hospitals, treatment facilities, and the community; between government departments and service sectors (e.g., education, justice and health); between professionals; and between areas of the province.

Implemented a community-based service hub model for youth:

- The Camrose Primary Care Network started a youth services hub to give young people a one-stop shop to get primary and mental health care and social services. A total of 124 young people have received services so far. More hubs will be created in the year ahead, focusing on small to medium sized communities to refine the hub model.

Created a comprehensive service listing:

- Currently, the 211 database, an online information service that helps people connect with the right community and social service, covers about 65 per cent of the province. It is being expanded to cover the whole province, so people can get information about addiction and mental health services that are close to home, especially in rural areas and Indigenous communities.

Developed pathways between systems:

- Specialized community mental health services through three different organizations were offered to immigrant and refugee families – 1,200 people received mental health services in Edmonton and Calgary.
- A new addiction and mental health clinic will open in Edmonton at the Royal Alexandra Hospital to provide a continuum of services twenty four-hours a day, seven days a week. In addition to existing staffing, 20 new dedicated staff will support the services at the clinic in order to streamline the process of navigating addiction and mental health services.

Expanded diversion programs:

- Newly-established case management groups are connecting offenders who are being released from provincial correctional centres to mental health and other services. The groups are in Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Strathcona County and Thorsby/Bretton.

- A dedicated Edmonton Mental Health Court opened in April 2018 to provide a more collaborative approach with additional resources to identify and address underlying issues
- Access to mental health diversion programs is increased in 11 communities to help people with mental health issues involved with the justice system get the help they need and stay out of the courts. For example, Court Liaisons in Lethbridge are working with Fort McLeod, Taber and other surrounding communities to connect clients with diversion services as appropriate.

Central Alberta FASD Network: Treaty 6 Wellbriety Movement

“There was a young male who came to Wellbriety circle at the Red Deer Native Friendship Centre. During the sharing circle, he shared how he had been introduced to Wellbriety through the Elder that came into Red Deer Remand. He was very thankful to find a Wellbriety group once he was released, as he has previously struggled to connect upon release. He felt welcomed right away and felt he actually had a chance to stay out this time with these new connections.”

– Fire Starter Wellbriety Facilitator, Red Deer Native Friendship Centre

Act on access: enhance the role of primary health care

These initiatives have worked to strengthen primary health care so that front-line health professionals know more about addiction and mental health and have resources to better support people with addiction and mental health needs.

Progressed on defining the role of primary care:

- Wait lists have been eliminated for low-income and homeless Calgarians seeking primary and mental health services from the Calgary Urban Partnership Society with \$1.4 million in new funding to expand their Shared Care Mental Health Team.

Increased counselling capacity:

- 12 sexual assault centres in Alberta provided more than 27,000 specialized counselling sessions and helped over 4,300 new clients. Waitlists have been cut by over 80% in Lloydminster and eliminated in Fort McMurray. Both communities have also increased supports for their rural clients to access services, such as transportation services.
- Government is providing more than \$450,000 to Eating Disorder Support Network of Alberta to improve face-to-face and virtual access to specialized eating disorder support groups for those affected and their families. New, online professional-led and peer support groups increase access for people in rural areas or smaller cities.

Trained first point of contact service providers:

- Mental Health First Aid training was delivered to 200 government staff working in disability services. Over 250 seniors and people who care for them have taken seniors-focused Mental Health First Aid training and more than 40 sessions have been booked with 1,100 registrants will be taking training sessions in rural and urban centers across Alberta. 22 new instructors were trained in Alberta to meet very high demand.
- First Nations and Métis communities are organizing Mental Health First Aid training in their communities. All Métis Settlements will be offered the training and up to 36 instructors from First Nations communities will be trained by April 2019.
- 227 police officers and frontline health staff received training in Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat and St. Paul to help them work better together for people with addiction and mental health needs interacting with law enforcement. Additional sessions are planned for Red Deer, Lethbridge and other communities.

Supported Albertans with adverse childhood experiences:

- About 1,600 children experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse received mental health support in Edmonton from the Zebra Child Protection Centre with funding to support the work of child advocacy centres across the province.
- New funding for Hospice Calgary gives over 2,000 children, teens and their parents access to grief counselling when dealing with the loss of someone close to them.

Act early: focus on prevention and early intervention

The following activities highlight increased prevention and early intervention efforts so fewer Albertans require addiction and mental health services and better find addiction and mental health resources and supports at home and in their communities.

Partnership for Integrated Services: Red Deer Public Schools and Alberta Health Services

“We have six mental health therapists in 10 schools...counsellors and teachers make direct referrals to the therapist. No-show rates have decreased to zero as the therapist just takes the next kid on the list...completed sessions has increased, waiting times have decreased and there are always one to two available appointments for urgent cases each week.”

– AHS Central Zone

Supported mental health in learning environments:

- The government added \$5 million for mental health services in schools. This means more than 100,000 students across Alberta will be able to access counseling and other services if needed. New funding prioritizes students from rural and indigenous communities. New funding prioritizes students from rural and Indigenous communities.

- 26 post-secondary institutions across Alberta, 15 of which have programming in smaller urban or rural communities, received \$13.2 million to increase addiction and mental health services on campus. All 26 post-secondary institutions are increasing access to crisis intervention, screening, and short term care: 40 full-time trained care providers have been hired since August 2017. Most post-secondary institutions are also developing new strategies and running skill-building programs on campus. In addition, ten post-secondary institutions and five First Nations colleges received a total of \$656,500 to provide culturally affirming mental health services to Indigenous students.

Improving Post-Secondary Mental Health

“In early 2018, a student in residence disclosed suicidal thoughts to a residence assistant. Because of Mental Health First Aid training, the assistant knew how to respond and support the student in crisis.”

– *Story from a Post-Secondary Institution*

Applied harm reduction in service delivery:

- Over 113,325 naloxone kits were delivered as part of government’s emergency opioid response and more than 6578 drug reversals were reported as a result. Across Alberta, community pharmacies dispensed an average of 1,577 naloxone kits per month.
- Supervised consumption services have opened in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge. A temporary overdose prevention site opened in Red Deer in October. Government is also supporting the work of Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie to bring these services to their cities.
- First Nations and Métis communities received \$5 million in funding to develop and deliver their own programs to respond to the opioid crisis.

Act on system enhancements, legislation and standards

To ensure that Albertans know that addiction and mental health services provide safe, quality services and have consumer protections within health and in the community, government has worked with partners on the following initiatives to review existing services, explore legislative options and to develop standards.

Developed regulations and standards for addiction providers:

- [Finding Quality Addiction Care Guide](#), the first of its kind in Canada, was released in November 2017.

- Government passed an *Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis*. It gives the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Commission the authority to manage the distribution and regulation of cannabis in the province.
- Engaged Albertans on the need to license and regulate private addiction facilities to protect Albertans who are seeking addiction services.
- Through grant funding, Indigenous Peoples are leading work to inform the development of minimum provincial service standards for residential addiction treatment programs to make sure they are culturally informed and safe for everyone who needs them.

Many other improvements to the addiction and mental health system are occurring in addition to the activities and initiatives above. These include new community-led programs, services for people who need very specialized supports, and health promotion and awareness campaigns led by partners. For more information and further details, see Appendix 1.

See the next section for more information on what's planned for the coming year.

What's Next?

Through *Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps*, work will continue with partners – mental health professionals, stakeholder organizations, Indigenous Peoples, and communities – to improve addiction and mental health services and supports in the province. Over the next year, this work will include:

Improving information sharing:

- Providing community-based service groups a tool kit that provides information, checklists and guiding questions to explain information sharing rules, support coordinated client care with health and other systems, and help define data measures to track outcomes across systems.

Testing community integration models:

- Researching nine promising, community based service integration models, including peer support in emergency departments for youth in crisis, and wraparound navigation support for parents and children living with developmental disabilities and mental health needs.

Supporting Albertans with adverse childhood experiences:

- Implementing priority recommendations from provincial experts and stakeholders, focusing on developing tools to support professionals to understand, prevent and respond to the impacts of childhood trauma.

Increasing technology-based solutions:

- Selecting and implementing the best platform for integrated digital navigation, brief intervention, and follow-up supports via phone, text and chat, especially for youth, people in rural and Indigenous communities, and post-secondary students.

Developing a youth suicide prevention plan:

- This will include dedicated funding to First Nation and Métis communities to reduce Indigenous youth suicide. 550 individuals, service providers, youth with lived experience, Indigenous groups and others are informing the plan.

Developing regulations and standards for addiction providers:

- The Mental Health Services Protection Act was passed in December 2018. The legislation sets out consumer protection standards and licensing requirements for residential addiction treatment facilities and enables the establishment of a professional college for counselling therapists to guide professional practice standard.

Exploring funding models, clarifying roles and responsibilities:

- Continuing work on an inventory of cross-government and AHS addiction and mental health funding and services to identify disconnects, fill gaps and achieve a one-government approach to funding, policy development and program support.

The achievements made so far with government and community partners are significant, but there is still more work and improvements needed. That is why the Government of Alberta remains committed to strengthening the addiction and mental health system in Alberta and will continue to report to Albertans on the progress.