

Intergovernmental Context

While public health policy remains largely a responsibility of other orders of government, municipalities play a multi-faceted role in creating healthy communities and supporting the social determinants of health that help keep people safe and out of the healthcare system.

Some of the municipal activities that support the social determinants of health include delivering community services, parks and recreation programs, supporting housing and social programs (municipalities in Alberta receive provincial funding for Family and Community Support Services through an 80/20 cost sharing model to support community agencies in delivering preventive programs and services, community development initiatives, and social infrastructure), building active communities and promoting healthy living, equity, safety and addressing socio-economic factors that influence social inclusion, participation and healthy outcomes. Municipalities also directly respond to help safeguard the health and lives of individuals through their emergency protective services that include police officers, peace officers and firefighters.

In Alberta, while municipal governments have no formal role in healthcare delivery, the *Municipal Government Act* does broadly identify that a key municipal purpose is to “develop and maintain safe and viable communities” and to “provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary”. However, municipalities have limited financial capacity in comparison to other orders of government, and may be restricted from independently implementing certain health policy actions. As a result, municipal responses are reliant on government partnership opportunities and ongoing collaboration to identify and advance local health interests.

Recognizing the importance of strengthening overall coordination of efforts through a whole-of-government approach to supporting community health and well-being, the following provides an overview of some of the emerging federal and provincial initiatives as they more specifically relate to reducing drug poisonings that can help inform and align future municipal efforts. The attachment also highlights some of the broader advocacy efforts occurring through other municipal associations.

Government of Canada

At the national level, various activities related to illicit substance-use data-gathering, education, prevention, housing and shelter needs, enforcement and rehabilitation occur across a number of federal departments, most notably through Health Canada, Public Safety Canada, Department of Justice, Infrastructure Canada and through federal agencies such as the Public Health Agency of Canada, Correctional Service of Canada and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

The Government of Canada's website outlines various actions they are taking to address the overdose crisis, which highlights their efforts in areas such as: providing funding to support access to treatment and harm reduction services; funding awareness, prevention, and stigma reduction activities; authorizing supervised consumption sites, drug checking sites and approving other exemptions requests; enacting legislative changes; and supporting other research and surveillance initiatives¹.

The following bullets identify some of the emerging federal announcements and initiatives underway of potential interest:

- In June 2023, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer released a joint statement² that included the following messaging:

"The significant complexity of this crisis - and unique challenges posed by our toxic drug supply - call for a bold, nimble, comprehensive and evidence-based approach to meet people where they are at, reduce harms and save lives. This includes a range of actions, including robust prevention efforts, harm reduction services and supports, stigma reduction efforts and accessible treatment options..."

(June 26, 2023 Joint Statement from the Co-Chairs of the Special Advisory Committee on the Epidemic of Opioid Overdoses)

- The Federal 2023-24 budget included a commitment of \$144 million over 5 years (starting in 2023/24) to relaunch the Substance Use and Addictions Program³ that provides grants to support community-based projects that support substance use prevention, harm reduction and treatment initiatives. On September 29, 2023, Health Canada announced⁴ the subsequent launch of the national call for funding proposals with a November 22, 2023 deadline for submissions. Projects may begin as early as June 1, 2024 and must be completed no later than March 31, 2028.
- The Federal 2023-24 budget also identified other planned federal actions including expanding data collection on substance-related harms and analysis of the drug supply; supporting a new community program to

¹<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/federal-actions/overview.html>

²<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2023/06/joint-statement-from-the-co-chairs-of-the-special-advisory-committee-on-the-epidemic-of-opioid-overdoses--latest-national-data-on-substance-related.html>

³<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/canadian-drugs-substances-strategy/funding/substance-use-addictions-program.html>

⁴<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2023/09/health-canada-launches-national-call-for-proposals-for-the-substance-use-and-addictions-program.html>

prevent substance use among young people; expanding the prosecution of drug traffickers across borders; and, streamlining authorizations for supervised consumption sites and drug checking services.

- The Government of Canada is expected to release their Federal Framework to Reduce Recidivism implementation plan later this year, which will outline additional federal actions being taken to help ensure that individuals with mental health and addictions issues have an integrated release plan and the resources needed following their release from correctional facilities.
- The Government of Canada signaled plans to establish a new Canada Mental Health Transfer through an initial investment of \$4.5 billion over 5 years. This new transfer is intended to support provinces in further advancing their mental health and substance use actions, however we understand that this new funding has yet to be allocated and negotiations may still be required to confirm funding agreements and what provincial action plans may need to include. Further details have yet to be publicly released.

**note: This new transfer would be in addition to the Canada Health Transfer which provides funding to provinces to support healthcare which also includes mental health and addiction related services. For the 2023-24 fiscal year, the Province of Alberta is receiving \$6 billion.*

- On May 31, 2022, the Government of Canada announced approval for a three year pilot (from January 31, 2023 to January 31, 2026) to support British Columbia's request for a subsection 56 (1) exemption under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* so that adults in that province will not be subject to criminal charges for the possession of 2.5 grams of certain illegal drugs for personal use⁵. On September 14, 2023, Health Canada amended the personal possession exemption at BC's request, by adding spaces where it no longer applies, including outdoor playgrounds, spray pools and wading pools, and skate parks. This is the first exemption of this type that has been granted. Following this exemption approval:
 - the Government of Canada signaled plans to set up an arm's-length process with Canadian Institutes of Health Research to monitor the learnings from British Columbia's exemption (both on public health and on public safety) to demonstrate what works and the efficacy which would help other jurisdictions with future application considerations. Additionally, the federal government also supports ongoing research and monitoring on the impacts and trends of substance use through established corporations such as the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

⁵<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/controlled-substances-precursor-chemicals/policy-regulations/policy-documents/exemption-personal-possession-small-amounts-certain-illegal-drugs-british-columbia.html>

- On November 17, 2022, the Government of Canada amended the *Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* which now require police to consider alternatives (such as taking no actions, or warning the individual, or referring the individual to supports) as the default position before laying charges for the simple possession of drugs. Similarly, prosecutors should only pursue a prosecution if they are satisfied that the appropriate alternatives were considered. While the legislation does not go as far as legalization, it does support the principles of decriminalization and aligns with previous City of Edmonton advocacy efforts encouraging the Government of Canada to enact this legislation.
- On June 13, 2023, the Senate of Canada continued their debate of Bill S-232 respecting the development of a national strategy for the decriminalization of illegal substances⁶. At this time, the Bill has not passed Second Reading, and therefore any suggested actions under it remain theoretical pending further debate and discussion.

**note: see March 21, 2022 City of Edmonton Council report OCM01092 for additional background and the extensive application process for seeking a Section 56(1) exemption through Health Canada.*

Government of Alberta

At the provincial level, various activities related to illicit substance-use data-gathering, education, prevention, housing and shelter needs, enforcement, and rehabilitation occur across a number of provincial ministries, most notably through the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction, Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services, Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Infrastructure and provincial agencies such as Alberta Health Services.

The province's website provides an overview of some of the efforts they are taking in response to opioid-related deaths⁷. More detailed actions are also listed under their recovery-oriented approach website, which highlights the province's efforts in areas such as: funding additional addiction treatment spaces; providing more long-term residential addiction treatment centres (Recovery Communities); launching the Virtual Opioid Dependency Treatment Program and the Digital Overdose Response System; increasing mental health supports, counselling options and supporting the recovery coaches program; expanding drug treatment courts; expanding therapeutic living units in all provincial correctional facilities; supporting hybrid health and police facilities;

⁶ <https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/en/bill/44-1/s-232>

⁷ <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-opioid-crisis-response>

expanding access to opioid agonist treatment medications; and supporting community organizations in their addiction and mental health response efforts⁸.

Listed below are some of the emerging provincial announcements and initiatives underway of potential greater interest:

- The following statement was included in the recent mandate letter to the provincial Minister of Mental Health and Addiction:

“All of Canada, including Alberta, is experiencing an unprecedented and deadly mental health and addiction crisis. We must make addressing this crisis a cornerstone priority of our government.”

(Aug 2, 2023 Minister of Mental Health and Addiction Mandate Letter)

- There are a number of provincial Ministers mandate letters that identify various mental health and addiction related provincial actions of potential interest ranging from implementing reforms to the healthcare system, to expanding addictions and mental health supports, to providing safe transportation of mental health and addiction patients to appropriate health services, to developing new legislation and expanding drug trafficking enforcement efforts (see links for more details on those and other actions planned)⁹.
- On September 11, 2023, the Province announced new measures to strengthen the prosecution of repeat violent offenders and support detaining individuals who are considered a threat to public safety¹⁰.
- On August 3, 2023, a provincial news release referenced a directive issued to Alberta Health Services (AHS) to consolidate mental health and addiction programs, services and operations¹¹. The directive is not supposed to impact AHS funding for programs or service delivery, however it is unclear at this time what future changes may occur as the Province has also signaled plans to reform the healthcare system and also help enhance local decision making. According to the Province, their ministry-specific budget for mental health and addiction related supports is \$275 million in 2023/24, and AHS receives nearly \$1 billion provincial funding every year to deliver mental health and addiction services.

⁸<https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-recovery-oriented-system-of-care#:~:text=A%20recovery%2Doriented%20system%20of%20care%20is%20a%20coordinated%20network,intervention%20to%20treatment%20and%20recovery.>

⁹ <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/mandate-letters-to-ministers-2023>

¹⁰<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=88915317DE051-9480-0FA7-F1A55202D22F2A45>

¹¹<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=887656432A5B8-024F-1DA5-914D891AB849160>

**note: The City of Edmonton has ongoing collaboration with AHS through information sharing and alignment on a range of programs and services that improve public health outcomes for residents and visitors to Edmonton, including providing operational funding to expand the inventory of supportive housing units in Edmonton.*

- The Province announced plans to build a new recovery community in Edmonton that would provide long-term residential addiction treatment to individuals experiencing addiction. This facility would be in addition to the building of the new 75-bed recovery community in Enoch Cree Nation already announced that would support up to 300 people in the Edmonton area every year. The Province also signaled plans to construct a new 75-bed adult and 30-bed youth mental wellness centres in Edmonton. Further details on implementation plans for those facilities have yet to be shared.
- The Province will be providing funding to support operations for a proposed Community Health Hub and accompanying overdose prevention site in Old Strathcona to help serve an unmet need south of the North Saskatchewan River. While the City of Edmonton is not involved in this effort, and approvals for overdose prevention services are a federal responsibility, a City development permit is required. The project proponent is pursuing advancement following an Edmonton Subdivision and Development Appeal Board decision.
- On July 18, 2023, the province announced additional funding to expand 24/7 shelter spaces and long-term transition beds in Edmonton, which are also recognized as an important gateway to support homeless individuals with mental health and addiction challenges in accessing required services¹².
- On April 19, 2023 the province announced further investments in Edmonton to keep people safe while addressing mental health and addiction as healthcare issues¹³. This included:
 - \$3.5 million for 12 new social navigator positions and two team leads, which will double the number of Human-centred Engagement and Liaison Partnership (HELP) teams in Edmonton from 12 to 24. The EPS delivers the HELP program in partnership with six community agencies by pairing police officers with “social navigators” - social workers who help direct vulnerable individuals to proper social supports.
 - \$2 million for eight new social navigator positions to support the EPS Divergence and Desistance Branch, which works with individuals who

¹²<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=8869327F16D34-E105-83D6-CD3DD91565AA0045>

¹³<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=8697503855362-A43A-899D-443009A7FCDC4C05>

most frequently interact with the law enforcement and healthcare systems.

- \$2.4 million for eight mental health therapists to be placed in Edmonton's 911 Dispatch Centre and provide support to police officers over the phone with clinical expertise.
- \$6.3 million to add two healthcare practitioners, two paramedics, two recovery coaches and 12 community safety officers at EPS Downtown Division (and two paramedics at EPS' Northwest Division). This would support EPS' Integrated Care Centre, which opened on March 29, 2023 to provide a safe space for detained individuals who create disturbance due to the effect of drugs or alcohol and would otherwise end up in a holding cell.
- \$3 million for six new HELP team vehicles and facility upgrades.
- On April 4, 2023 the Province announced it would invest almost \$8 million over three years to increase the number of Police and Crisis Response Teams in Edmonton, which pair constables with AHS mental health therapists in responding to 911 calls where there is a mental health concern¹⁴. As a result of this funding, the number of PACT teams in Edmonton would triple from six to 18.
- In February 2023, the Province established an external Recovery Expert Advisory Panel to provide ongoing advice on best practices, research and innovation, policy and standards development, as well evaluation reporting to inform Alberta's recovery-oriented systems of care for addiction and mental health¹⁵.
- Discussions continue through the provincial Edmonton Public Safety and Community Response Task Force¹⁶. The mandate of the Task Force includes implementing a series of initiatives in the Edmonton metropolitan region to combat homelessness and increase access to addiction services and supports. Discussions continue between the Province, Edmonton representatives and other community partners to discuss provincial efforts underway.
- The Province released two new standards through the authority of the province's *Mental Health Services Protection Act*. Their [Recovery-oriented Supervised Consumption Services Standards](#) sets the minimum requirements that a licensed supervised consumption service provider must comply with in the provision of supervised consumption services¹⁷.

¹⁴<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=8688305998059-BE54-85F3-410AC8C6667CEC53>

¹⁵<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=86587C1CE1255-C36F-40EA-24E4A22D60B42271>

¹⁶ <https://www.alberta.ca/edmonton-public-safety-and-community-response-task-force>

¹⁷<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/78833e47-c447-4ae4-a84a-f404df404dcc/resource/c8eedaa7-eb7a-41db-b184-1c1f7c2912c1/download/health-recovery-oriented-supervised-consumption-services-standards.pdf>

Their *Community Protection and Opioid Stewardship Standards* sets the minimum requirements that a licensed narcotic service provider must comply with in the provision of narcotic transition services.

- On November 1, 2021, the Province released their 10-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing¹⁸. One of the seven actions (Action 1.6) outlined in the strategy, identifies that the province would “expand supportive housing for populations transitioning out of homelessness and requiring mental health and addiction support”. The Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services August 3, 2023 mandate letter calls on the Minister to continue to implement this strategy.
- The Province also identified other further actions including ensuring the safe transportation of mental health and addiction patients to appropriate health services, and creating sheriff-led anti-fentanyl trafficking teams to target drug smugglers.
- The Province is anticipated to pursue the development of compassionate intervention legislation which would seek to allow a family member, doctor or police officer to petition a court to require a person to participate in drug treatment. The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, August 2, 2023 mandate letter calls on the Minister to “work collaboratively with community and government partners” to develop this legislation.

Municipal Associations

The City of Edmonton is a member of, and has a longstanding relationship with a number of municipal associations across Canada. The following provides a summary of some of the advocacy efforts touching on the interconnected issues of mental health and addictions where there is alignment with City interests:

- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities that represents 2,000 municipalities across Canada, continues to call on all orders of government to invest in a variety of mental health and substance use care options, and encourage a coordinated and comprehensive approach to address the opioid crisis while also highlighting how the lack of affordable and supportive housing are contributing to the mental health and addictions issues occurring in municipalities.
- The Big City Mayors Caucus that brings together representatives from 23 of Canada’s biggest cities, identified shared concerns over the significant challenges facing their cities through growing mental health challenges that is impacting public safety and is worsened by a housing and homelessness challenge, has called for new fiscal tools to empower local

¹⁸<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/d17f3af6-fa5a-4cb0-b36e-248823cddff1/resource/d11b4795-763a-4221-b6f9-2f5769df50a5/download/sh-stronger-foundations-albertas-10-year-strategy-affordable-housing-2021.pdf>

governments to drive local solutions and highlighted the need for increased cooperation between all orders of government to address the growing mental health crisis.

- In the Fall of 2022, Alberta Municipalities that represent more than 300 municipalities from across Alberta overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution calling to attention the increasing drug poisoning crisis in Alberta and requesting increased provincial government investments, engagement and coordinated actions to address the urgent needs¹⁹. The resolution also recognized the need for increased provincial investments into affordable housing with ongoing wraparound services as part of an integrated approach for responding to homeless populations struggling with complex addiction and mental health challenges.

¹⁹<https://www.abmunis.ca/advocacy-resources/resolutions-library/advancing-action-albertas-drug-poisoning-crisis>