



Hon. Jason Copping, Minister of Health
Office of the Minister of Health
423 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

September 24, 2021

EZMSA Office
Suite 201 12315 Stony Plain Road NW
Edmonton, AB
T5N 3Y8

Dear Minister Copping:

Re: Emergency Policy Request for Opioid Poisoning Reduction

Alberta's healthcare system is struggling to meet increasing demand due to the high number of COVID-19 patients needing hospital and intensive care.

The current provincial approach to addressing drug poisoning is further exacerbating the acute care system resource shortage. Because our communities do not have the resources needed to respond to drug poisonings in a timely fashion, people experiencing drug poisonings end up requiring the services of first responders, emergency departments, and Intensive Care Units (ICUs) more often. In addition, people who initially survive a severe drug poisoning may need ICU-level care but not benefit if the response time is delayed. These are people who are loved by their family and friends and would have a better chance of surviving with a timely response.

We know that Alberta's current approach to the drug poisoning crisis unnecessarily strains acute care resources and is directly contributing to an increasing number of deaths.

The province can take immediate, pragmatic, evidence informed, and cost-effective action to mitigate health system strain, avoid drug poisoning deaths, and make more critical care resources available to COVID-19 patients.



To do so, we recommend the following emergency actions:

1. Return harm reduction capacity to community settings to ensure a timely drug poisoning response. This includes reinstating recently closed in-person supervised consumption services and fast-tracking expanded access to emergency overdose prevention sites in at least Alberta's seven major cities.
2. Provide emergency access to alternatives to the circulating illegal drug supply by expanding access to injectable opioid agonist treatment (iOAT) programs.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the above emergency policy actions are lifesaving not only for people who use drugs, but for all Albertans in need of intensive care.

We would be interested in meeting on this to coordinate details.

Sincerely

Dr. Ginetta Salvalaggio

Dr. Cheryl Mack

Co-Chairs, Opioid Poisoning Committee
Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association

CC: Dr. Verna Yiu, Chief Executive Officer, Alberta Health Services
Hon. Jason Kenney, Premier, Province of Alberta
Hon. Mike Ellis, Associate Minister of Addiction and Mental Health, Province of Alberta
Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Province of Alberta
Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada
Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. Patty Hadju, Minister of Health of Canada
Dr. Paul Boucher, President, Alberta Medical Association
Mayor Don Iveson, City of Edmonton
Mayor Naheed Nenshi, Mayor of Calgary



Moms Stop the Harm

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UofA School of Public Health

Protect Our Province

Canadian Drug Policy Coalition

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School of Public Health Students'
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Harm Reduction Nurses' Association

Edmonton Emergency Physicians
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Dr. Paul Parks on behalf of the Section of
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