

Community Drug Strategy Committee

Follow-up report • 2021

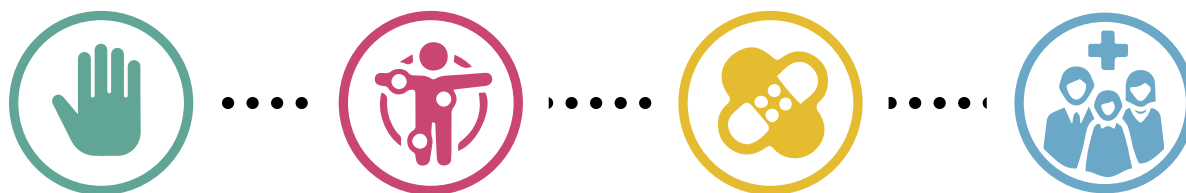


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Introduction

The Strathcona County Community Drug Strategy was developed in 2018 by the Strathcona County Community Drug Strategy Committee, comprised of multisystem representatives from community organizations and the public sector. The work was guided by the Strathcona County Social Framework, which outlines the social direction for Strathcona County, and informed how the community convened, reflected, and approached the complexity of substance misuse in Strathcona County.

The Strathcona County Community Drug Strategy Committee includes representatives from the following community organizations and public institutions:

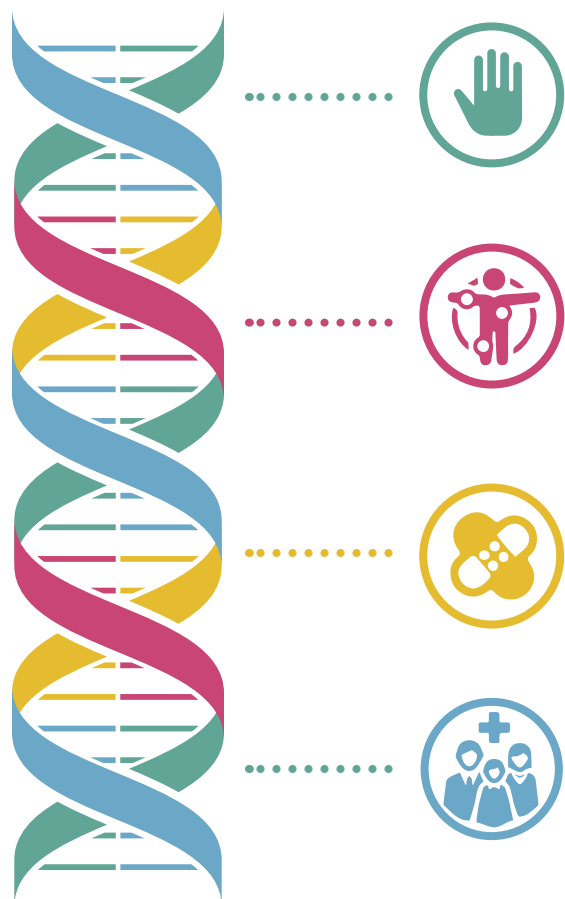
- A Safe Place
- Alberta Children and Family Services
- Alberta Health Services
- Chimo Youth Retreat Centre
- Elk Island Catholic School Board (EICS)
- Elk Island Public School Board (EIPS)
- Hope in Strathcona
- Parents Empowering Parents Society (PEP)
- Primary Care Network (PCN)
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
- Salvation Army
- Strathcona County Family and Community Services (FCS)

The Committee identified that substance use is perpetuated by system-level stigma and assumptions, complexity in access to support, siloed responses, and traditional treatment options. A response to the complexity of substance misuse required multiple systems to take collective ownership and tackle the issue at its root. The Drug Strategy reflects this intention, focusing on prevention, treatment, harm reduction and community inclusion and safety. Since 2018, the Committee has continued to meet to support the shared actions and commitments identified in the Drug Strategy and respond to emerging key issues related to substance misuse in our community.

FOUR PILLARS



This report outlines progress made by committee members and the community to address the commitments identified in the Drug Strategy and highlights the major initiatives undertaken to reduce stigma and increase empathy of those living with opioid use. The commitments fall within four pillars, including:



1. PREVENTION

Prevention strategies aim to prevent the problems of substance use before they start. Recognizing experimentation with substances does occur and that if people choose to experiment, they understand how to do so as safely as possible.

2. TREATMENT

Treatment includes a broad range of community-based medical and counselling interventions, outreach support and other bio-psychosocial programs that work with individuals experiencing difficulties related to their use of psychoactive substances and to support positive behaviour change.

3. HARM REDUCTION

Harm reduction involves an achievable, pragmatic approach to substance issues and seeks to reduce the individual and societal harms associated with substance use.

4. COMMUNITY INCLUSION AND SAFETY

Community inclusion and connection is a key factor in safe communities. People want to live in places where they know and like their neighbours - where they can do things together and help create welcoming and safe communities in which to raise their children and grow old.

The World is facing an opioid crisis.

Mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, grandparents, friends, neighbours and family members are all impacted.

Thousands of lives have been forever changed. No one is immune no matter our age, race, gender, education or income.

Everyone has a story here.

In this exhibit, you are invited to follow a 10 - 20 minute journey through the fictionalized story of someone facing a personal opioid crisis. While the character's names and faces are fictional, their stories are based on real lived experiences and statistics relating to the opioid crisis.

Things to know about the experience:

- Follow the coloured path of our three characters. It will help guide you through significant events, places and information in their story.
- Allow 15 minutes to go through one journey. Be sure to take some time at the end to nourish and reflect.
- You have the option to walk away at any time. Please touch base with our volunteers in the nourishment area in the back if you need any assistance.
- Share your thoughts. Please fill out a survey at the beginning and end to share any reflections you have during the event.

Take the "what would you do?" challenge!

- To help understand how present the pain avoidance and relief-seeking cycle is, carry a stone with you for the duration of the exhibit.
- Based on the choices you make in the exhibit, the stone will be an active part of your journey.

On average, over 11 Canadians die every day due to an opioid-related overdose.

Globe and Mail September 18, 2018

Why are opioids at the centre of this crisis?

Opioids are powerful, different from other drugs and often deadly.

The crisis is complex with many contributing factors. Opioids have been used for pain management. Many people who use prescribed opioids for pain management become dependent through no fault of their own.

Once the addictive nature of opioids was understood, many people were left struggling with the lack of alternate services for chronic pain management, as well as a complicated addiction.

How do opioids work?

Opioids bind with receptors in the brain that control feelings, emotions and motivation. Opioids reduce pain signals to the brain and increase levels of the "feel good hormone" called dopamine.

Dopamine is a part of our reward and motivation system, and is released when we experience intense emotional and physical activities like loving or exercise. Blocking the brain's ability to experience pain and increasing dopamine creates a strong physical and emotional sensation, or high.

With repeated use, opioids rewire the brain's reward and motivation system, making it extremely difficult for people to break the mental and physical dependency. Opioids eventually lose effectiveness at blocking pain signals but some people who need to live more "just to feel normal." The need to feel "normal" coupled with intense physical withdrawal symptoms create an all-consuming cycle of use and keeping using, leading to addictive behaviour.

The science behind addiction.

Addiction is marked by observable and predictable changes in the brain. With repeated substance use it is a choice, the brain's normal functions are hijacked by repeated substance use, making it extremely difficult to stop using. Functional changes include altered reward and motivation system and changes to coping skills. Individuals with addiction often make numerous failed attempts to stop and frequently relapse.

Understanding the science of addiction is important for prevention and recovery. Support from medical professionals, community resources and family members has been shown to be effective in re-establishing quality brain activity and restoring personal human connections is an important strategy in countering the crisis.

Addiction is neither a choice nor a disease, but originates in a human being's desperate attempt to solve a problem: the problem of emotional pain, of overwhelming stress, of loss, of loss of control, of a deep disconnect with the self. In short, it is a human attempt to solve the problem of human pain.

Hence my message:

"The question is not why the addiction, but why the pain!"

- Dr. Gabor Mate



Max
A good student, and want to be a doctor.

After just moved to his new province, he is struggling with his new life. He is different and he is trying to fit in, but he can't seem to find his place.

He has trouble going to his new friends and he is feeling lonely.

He is struggling to find his place in the world.

He is struggling to find his place in the world.

He is struggling to find his place in the world.

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He is struggling to find his place in the world.

Which of these could contain fentanyl?

1. A pill bottle labeled "Painkillers"

2. A bottle of "Antibiotics"

3. A box of "Cough Syrup"

4. A bottle of "Vitamin Water"

5. A box of "Toothpaste"

6. A bottle of "Hand Sanitizer"

7. A box of "Candy"

8. A bottle of "Shampoo"

9. A box of "Socks"

10. A bottle of "Lotion"

11. A box of "Toilet Paper"

12. A bottle of "Deodorant"

13. A box of "Napkins"

14. A bottle of "Conditioner"

15. A box of "Paper Plates"

16. A bottle of "Body Lotion"

17. A box of "Paper Cups"

18. A bottle of "Fragrance"

19. A box of "Paper Towels"

20. A bottle of "Shower Gel"

21. A box of "Paper Napkins"

22. A bottle of "Body Wash"

23. A box of "Paper Plates"

24. A bottle of "Deodorant"

25. A box of "Paper Cups"

26. A bottle of "Conditioner"

27. A box of "Napkins"

28. A bottle of "Lotion"

29. A box of "Toilet Paper"

30. A bottle of "Hand Sanitizer"

31. A box of "Candy"

32. A bottle of "Shampoo"

33. A box of "Socks"

34. A bottle of "Vitamin Water"

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36. A bottle of "Cough Syrup"

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Opioids Don't Discriminate: An Interactive Exhibit

In addition to the strategy, the Community Drug Strategy Committee led the development of Opioids Don't Discriminate: An Interactive Experience (ODD). The one-of-a-kind exhibit profiled local opioid use statistics and community support while inviting participants to walk through the journey of three different narratives of David, Max and Natasha.

These stories, based on real-life experiences of those affected by opioid use, addressed the pervasive stigmas and judgments about people who use drugs while strengthening empathy and understanding of substance use. Over two days in 2018, and four days in 2019, more than 1,200 participants visited the exhibit. Since its development, the ODD exhibit has won both provincial and national awards of excellence and has been shared with three municipalities and requested by twelve municipalities/community organizations.

Following the success of the ODD exhibit, a comprehensive Do-it-Yourself (DIY) Kit was created to support communities in adapting and hosting their own ODD exhibit. The DIY kit explains the approach, concepts, tools and learning employed to develop and run the exhibit. The DIY kit enables communities across the globe to continue to take steps to reduce stigma and increase empathy for those affected by the opioid crisis. The DIY kit can be found at www.strathcona.ca/drugstrategy.



Reporting on Commitments

This section details the progress made on each of the commitments outlined in the Community Drug Strategy under the four key pillars of Prevention, Treatment, Harm Reduction, and Community Inclusion and Safety.

Please note, some actions outlined under this section can be categorized under multiple commitments but have been characterized under the most relevant commitment.







1. PREVENTION

1A. Implement and evaluate broad-based community education campaigns on early brain development, root causes of addiction, stigma, etc.

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

• Family and Community Services (FCS)

- » Development of the Opioids Don't Discriminate Interactive Experience Exhibit to strengthen empathy and understanding of real-life experiences of substance use (All)
- » Published Sherwood Park News article on reducing stigma related to Naloxone use (Primary Care Network [PCN])
- » Ongoing program delivery from Family Community Services and partner organizations related to supporting early brain development, well-being and positive relationships for families and youth (e.g. Boys and Girls Club CanTEEN Youth Hub, Kids Have Stress Too! and Straight Talk about Teens) (FCS)
- » Ongoing staff training to deepen understanding of brain development and its connection to addiction and mental health (FCS)
- » Ongoing delivery of social support services that enable community members to build skills, access community resources and provide supports to help address the root causes of addiction (FCS)





1B. Support resiliency for children and families by ensuring education, arts/recreation opportunities and supports are available through an interdisciplinary approach

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **Elk Island Catholic School (EICS)**

- **Elk Island Public School (EIPS) Divisions**

- » Ongoing navigation and connecting families to services in the community (Parents Empowering Parents [PEP])
- » Ongoing Mental Health and chronic disease management classes (PCN)
- » Resources available for teachers to offer mental health support in their classrooms, including the Wellness Administrative Procedure outlining a shared language for mental health, common practices, and connection to overall well-being (EICS)
- » Ongoing programs targeted to youth and adults supporting youth about building resiliency and overcoming adversity (e.g. Youth Connect¹, mentoring programs, etc.) and development of long term, multi-stakeholder partnerships with community organizations to deliver youth capacity building programming (i.e. Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Club, EICS, EIPS, altView) (FCS)

1. <https://www.strathcona.ca/community-families/youth/youth-connect/>

1C. Increase evidence-based alcohol and drug prevention programming for youth in the Strathcona County school systems and broader community

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **Elk Island Catholic School (EICS)**

- **Elk Island Public School (EIPS) Divisions**

- » Ongoing delivery of DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) programs in schools and drug/alcohol awareness presentations (RCMP)
- » Ongoing awareness presentations to EICS staff and with supplementary educational inserts for EIPS newsletters (PEP)
- » Ongoing presentations and information booths at schools (Alberta Health Services [AHS])
- » Continue to convene the Tobacco Vaping Advisory Committee and provide ongoing presentations at high schools and to school staff on vaping (PCN)





1D. Increase workplace addiction-related health and safety education and improve addiction-related supports in the workplace

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

• All

- » Ongoing professional development opportunities (PEP)
- » Provide ongoing resources to school staff in addiction-related education and assistance, such as the Employee Family Wellness Program that provides free support (EICS)
- » FCS's social supports team continues to increase awareness for school staff, businesses, and non-profits on the availability of community resources and increase skills and abilities to promote positive mental health and wellness (FCS)
- » Ongoing delivery of Traumatic Events Systems training and Violent Threat Risk Assessment training to support the community through the impact and aftermath of large-scale traumatic events and improve community health, social, safety and well-being outcomes (FCS)
- » Psychological First Aid available to provide staff, and community, with the knowledge of how to care for themselves and others during crisis and how to connect to other resources and supports in the community (FCS)



1E. Simplify and increase access to addiction and mental health information, including the development of a resource guide and road map

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

• Alberta Health Services (AHS)

- » AHS developed DrugSafe² – an online trusted source for Albertans to find vital information on reducing the harm drugs can cause, including information on alcohol, cannabis, methamphetamine, and opioids (AHS)
- » Development of the FCS Program Guide³ and website highlighting available resources and social supports in the community (FCS)
- » Ongoing delivery of social support services that provide residents with individualized supports to help identify goals and strengths, create an action plan, build skills and access community resources (FCS)

1F. Enhance the level of dialogue between sectors and institutions to access and share local substance use data

Lead Organization:

• All

- » Strathcona County Community Drug Strategy Committee continues to meet to discuss local emerging trends, key issues and opportunities to collaborate on issues related to substance misuse (All)
- » The Strathcona County Tobacco Vaping Advisory Committee has enhanced dialogue about vaping throughout the community (PCN)

2. <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page12491.aspx?page12491.aspx>

3. <https://www.strathcona.ca/community-families/parents-children-families/additional-resources/>



2.TREATMENT

2A. Deliver diverse treatment options along the continuum of treatment from outreach and community-based through to post-recovery, not only for those who are addicted but for those around them

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **Alberta Health Services**

- » The Opioid Dependency Program clinic continues to support individuals dependent on opioids and interested in replacement therapy (AHS)
- » The Addiction and Mental Health clinic continues to provide Individual treatment for people experiencing addiction (AHS)
- » AHS continues to work with youth impacted by substance use of others around them (AHS)
- » Training on suboxone usage provided for physicians providing care for patients using opioids (PCN)





2B. Monitor programs and services, identify gaps and work collaboratively to address gaps

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **All**

- » Training provided in medical clinics on opioid use disorder and opioid agonist therapy (PCN)
- » Family Wellness Workers and Wellness Teams deployed in each school to collaborate, monitor, and promote mental health, positive relationships, preventative and supportive practices (EICS)
- » Continue to convene, lead and actively contribute to various committees and networks across service areas to identify community trends, identify and address community needs and address gaps (i.e., Social Framework Leadership Table, Interagency Table, Child and Youth Coalition, etc.) (FCS)

2C. Support access to evidence-based, affordable residential treatment services for youth and adults

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **Alberta Health Services**

- » Ongoing system navigation to connect families to services in the community (PEP)
- » Availability of Addiction Counsellors in supporting clients to get into residential treatment programs when they are ready and interested (AHS)
- » Availability of AHS treatment options for youth at no-cost to reduce financial barriers (AHS)
- » Ongoing delivery of post-recovery addiction services (Hope in Strathcona)
- » Ongoing navigation of community support and services, including treatment services (FCS)

2D. Improve the way opioids are prescribed for more effective chronic pain management and reduction in misuse or overdose from these drugs

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **Alberta Health Services**

- » Education campaign on prescribing opioids for pain via Primary Care Networks (PCN)
- » The Opioid Dependency Program continues to provide replacement therapy for those who identify as having dependence/addiction to opioids (AHS)
- » Distribution of Naloxone kits from the Addictions and Mental Health Clinic available for anyone that asks (AHS)
- » 100+ workshops for physicians and staff regarding opioid use disorder (PCN)





3. HARM REDUCTION

3A. Increase safety programming for people who inject, inhale or drink substances, and increase maintenance programs to help with withdrawal as people minimize their use

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **Alberta Health Services**

- » Clients are not required to be abstinent, only that they are not impaired at the time of appointment (AHS)
- » Naloxone distribution clinics within Primary Care Network (PCN)

3B. Increase overdose prevention and awareness programming

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **Primary Care Network**

- » Consistently provide resources and materials through meetings and the support line (PEP)
- » Naloxone program spread throughout all Addictions and Mental Health programs (AHS)
- » Educate youth on overdose/alcohol poisoning, signs and symptoms (AHS)





4. COMMUNITY INCLUSION AND SAFETY

4A. Create welcoming and inclusive communities where citizens have the opportunity for meaningful connections, and every individual is respected

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

• All

- » Addictions and Mental Health clinic runs a number of groups that support treatment and connections with others experiencing similar circumstances (AHS)
- » Multiple group programs open to the public related to mental health, physical activity, and healthy eating
- » Supporting positive connection between mental health and relationships has become a divisional priority within the school board (EICS)
- » Strathcona County Family and Community Services has supported various initiatives to foster the development of safe supported and connected communities, including the 2019 Social Summit⁴, Reach out Speak Out⁵ and the Choose Kind Campaign⁶ (FCS)
- » Supporting community connection through the delivery of Community Connection and Community Change Grants⁷ (FCS)
- » Organizing and supporting drop-in community events to support community connection (FCS)



4. <https://www.strathcona.ca/community-families/community-programs/social-summit/#agenda>

5. <https://www.strathcona.ca/council-county/news/news/2020/11/2/reach-out-speak-out-2020/#:~:text=Residents%20can%20call%20780%2D464,Information%20Line%3A%20310%2D1818.>

6. <https://www.strathcona.ca/community-families/well-being-and-mental-health/choose-kind/>

7. <https://www.strathcona.ca/community-families/community-programs/grants-and-funding/community-seed-grants/>



4B. Increase the coordinated approach between police and community stakeholders in addressing substance-use related crime

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **RCMP**

- » Social Worker works as part of the detachment within Victim Services (RCMP)
- » Solutions Navigation is embedded within the RCMP to provide individualized connection and access to provide direct access to services and community supports (FCS)
- » Development of a Community Safety and Well-Being strategy in partnership with RCMP, which takes an upstream approach to address risk, vulnerability and harm (FCS)



4C. Support connected and inclusive communities and provide appropriate supports for individuals and families impacted by substance use

LEAD ORGANIZATION:

- **Family and Community Services**

- » Presentations to Robin Hood Foundation for staff wellness day (PEP)
- » Referrals to Family Counsellors at Youth Addictions Services Edmonton or Parents Empowering Parents (AHS)
- » Ongoing operation of FCS social support services to provide individualized navigation to access and connect with social services and supports in the community (FCS)
- » Development of the Opioids Don't Discriminate Interactive Experience Exhibit to strengthen empathy and understanding of substance use and enhance awareness of local supports and services (All)
- » Hosted the inaugural Social Summit Conference⁸ which allowed community practitioners, innovators and change agents to learn about the importance of community connection as a social determinant of health (FCS)



8. <https://www.strathcona.ca/community-families/community-programs/social-summit/>

Conclusion

The Strathcona County Community Drug Strategy Committee represents an important commitment to provide an evidence-based approach towards providing actions needed to address the harmful effects of drug use in our community. Between 2018 - 2021, the Community Drug Strategy Committee supported individuals in Strathcona County experiencing substance use challenges by providing supports and services that fall under the priority banners of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and community inclusion safety.

Substance use exists within a complex setting that features multiple systems such as health and social services, jurisdictions, population characteristics and treatment approaches. This complexity and the repeated misalignment of policies and efforts often result in barriers for those trying to access supports and those working within these systems. Challenges such as difficulty navigating systems, short-term solutions, siloed responses, and new treatments not being embraced continue to contribute to substance use issues. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had severe health, social and psychological impacts for Strathcona County residents. These realities are likely to further exacerbate substance use and stress factors due to increased isolation, loss of social connection, and supports.

As a community, we must continue to prioritize addressing risk, safety, vulnerability and trauma to target the root causes of addiction to support those experiencing substance use. Furthermore, we must create conditions that support the development of relationships, strong social connections and community well-being as foundational elements of prevention. In these unprecedented times, Strathcona County Community Drug Strategy Committee will continue to convene and support upstream, community-wide and collective work to advance community safety and wellbeing in Strathcona County.





STRATHCONA
COUNTY