



# Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy

2024 Annual Report



# Content

2	Statement on reconciliation
3	Minister's message
4	Executive summary
5	Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy (SUHES) background
6	Updated vision and foundational values for the implementation of the SUHES
7	Oversight committee
7	Implementation committee
8	The four areas of growth
8	What do the status icons of the SUHES report mean?
9	Progress: fourteen initial actions
15	Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy progress

**16 Area 1: Prevention**

**25 Area 3: Treatment and recovery support**

**20 Area 2: Harm reduction**

**31 Area 4: Community safety and wellbeing**

35	Related strategies and plans
36	Looking forward
37	Get in touch
38	Notes

# Statement on reconciliation

The development and implementation of the actions of the Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy take place on the Traditional Territories of the Indigenous peoples, represented today by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun, Kluane First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Liard First Nation, Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation, Ross River Dena Council, Selkirk First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Teslin Tlingit Council, Trondek Hwech'in Government, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, White River First Nation, as well as the Traditional Territories overseen by the Acho Dene Koe First Nation, Dease River First Nation, Gwich'in Tribal Council, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Kwadacha Nation, Tahltan Central Government, Taku River Tlingit First Nation and the Tetlit Gwich'in Council.

In executing the actions detailed in this strategy on these Traditional Territories, our government acknowledges the profound connection between the land and the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. We recognize that the land extends beyond just the earth. It encompasses the water, air, food, medicines and all aspects of nature. The partners involved in this endeavor recognize and value the significance of Indigenous voices in all responses to the Substance Use Health Emergency. We acknowledge the necessity to consider the path to reconciliation, recognizing the ongoing impact of colonization on these lands and the call for action to address the harms.

Reconciliation is a continuous journey of learning from the past to understand our present better, which enables us to envision and work towards a healthier future for all Yukoners. The legacy of residential schools and the persistent effects of intergenerational trauma and colonization have led to significant health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Yukon. These disparities, resulting in unjust, avoidable gaps in health outcomes, often stem from systemic injustice. All partners involved in the Yukon Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy commit to leveraging our work and influence to help reduce these gaps.

We recognize and honour the extraordinary resilience of Indigenous peoples in the Yukon, who have persisted in the face of these disparities and systemic barriers. These strengths form the foundation of improved health for all Yukoners. The processes of health improvement and reconciliation can reinforce each other. The growth of reconciliation helps to create environments where disparities are reduced, and health and justice can thrive.

# Minister's message



One year ago, in response to an unacceptable increase in opioid-related deaths and substance use-related harms in the territory, the Government of Yukon released the Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy (SUHES).

As the Substance Use Health Emergency continues, so does the resulting tragedy. Through the SUHES, we remain committed to tackling the issue with urgency and compassion. Given the complex nature of addiction and the devastating effects of a poisoned drug supply, it is imperative that we work together to provide effective support and solutions.

Over the course of the year, the SUHES has been implemented through working closely with community partners, First Nations and governments to coordinate actions and respond on a range of initiatives in prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support, and community safety and wellbeing. These actions are outlined in this first annual report.

I want to acknowledge and thank our many partners for their continued support responding to the Substance Use Health Emergency, including the Council of Yukon First Nations, Blood Ties Four Directions, the Yukon RCMP, Yukon Hospitals, and all First Nations, communities and other levels of government.

Our work to respond to the Substance Use Health Emergency will continue with our partners, stakeholders, and in collaboration with Yukoners.

As Minister of Health and Social Services and Minister of Justice, I am dedicated to advancing initiatives that create safe and healthy communities. I want everyone in the Yukon to have an opportunity to live well and flourish.

Honourable Tracy-Anne McPhee

Minister of Health and Social Services, Minister of Justice

# Executive summary

The Government of Yukon released the Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy (SUHES) in August 2023 in partnership with Yukon First Nation governments, the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN), Blood Ties Four Directions, the Yukon RCMP, the Yukon Hospital Corporation and other stakeholders and community partners. The initial strategy identified 43 recommended actions and was designed as a living document to ensure flexibility and ongoing collaboration with partners, stakeholders and communities.

Upon initial release of the SUHES, the Government of Yukon provided funding to support collaborative efforts aimed at implementing an initial 14 actions outlined in the strategy. Encompassing all four areas of growth – prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety and wellbeing – these actions continue to progress and hold the potential for further advancement through collaborative efforts.

This first progress report provides an update on the 43 actions completed, underway, in planning phase, or yet to begin. Highlighted actions indicate the initial 14 actions. Since the release of the strategy, some actions have been slightly redefined or have moved between the four areas of growth. This reflects the nature of the strategy as a living document. As actions roll out, elements are sometimes found to fit better under different areas.

The Government of Yukon allocated \$2.5 million for these 14 actions for the 2023–24 fiscal year. As the Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy evolves, the Government of Yukon remains committed to allocating the necessary resources to support the safety of all Yukoners.

This strategy provides a roadmap that will allow us all to continue to respond in a way that promotes the health and wellbeing of Yukoners.

# Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy (SUHES) background

In January 2022, the Government of Yukon declared a Substance Use Health Emergency in response to the high number of overdose deaths. The Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy (SUHES) was developed and released in August 2023 as a collaborative answer to this ongoing tragedy. The primary purpose of the strategy is to provide a roadmap for action on how the Government of Yukon, working with partners, can reduce substance use-related harms in the territory.

In the Yukon, as in all Canadian jurisdictions, substance use remains a pressing serious health and societal issue and continues unabated. In general, poly-substance use is the norm with consumption of alcohol, along with cocaine and/or opioids. Indigenous peoples are over-represented in the substance use emergency in the Yukon and in Canada. This tragic fact has been highlighted both in coroner's updates as well as in the recent inquest into a series of deaths at 405 Alexander Street in Whitehorse.

In 2021 and 2022, there were 25 substance-related deaths in the Yukon. In 2023, there were 23 confirmed substance-use related deaths in the Yukon. These deaths primarily involved opioids and cocaine, and alcohol has been noted as a contributing factor in many cases. Between January and October 2024, the Yukon Coroner's Service has confirmed 12 substance use deaths and 2 more suspected deaths. Of the 12 confirmed deaths, all but one death occurred in Whitehorse. Eleven involved opioids; ten involved cocaine; ten involved fentanyl; nine involved both cocaine and fentanyl; and five involved alcohol.

As noted above, alcohol consumption is often a factor in substance-related deaths. This is consistent with what we know about alcohol consumption in the Yukon. In addition, on its own, alcohol consumption remains a significant issue with over 2,000 visits to Yukon emergency departments each year for the last three years. Hospitalizations entirely caused by alcohol consistently make up the vast majority of hospital stays for harm caused by substance use.

# Updated vision and foundational values for the implementation of the SUHES

## Vision

The vision of the SUHES progress report expands on the original strategic vision that “Yukoners maintain mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical wellness throughout their lifetimes, thereby contributing to wellness within their families, cultures, and communities.”

Our updated vision is to create a thriving and sustainable wellness landscape in the Yukon that prioritizes the health and wellness of all residents – now and for future generations. The implementation of this strategy is our commitment to fostering programs and services that promote wellbeing and resilience throughout the territory.

## Foundational values

### Inclusivity

It is essential that People With Lived Experience – from all walks of life – are included in the continued development and implementation of this strategy. Dignity, equity and respect for the expertise of those living with substance use are essential in accomplishing this value.

### Innovation

The problem of substance use and its many effects is often called a “wicked problem” – a complex challenge with no clear solutions. Wicked problems demand creative, multi-pronged approaches. Opportunities present themselves when we open our minds and hearts to new ways of understanding this multi-layered issue.

### Patience and perseverance

As stated in the introduction of the Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy, there is no one reason for this emergency; we are here today because of myriad factors interplaying over many years. Consequently, we must invest in diverse solutions that follow multiple paths towards wellness. We must also remember that real, sustained change takes time. As we mourn those we have lost, we must persevere and put in the time and the work to see long-term projects through – especially those intended to protect young people from the harms related to substance use.

### Evidence

The issue of substance use may be primarily seen as health-related but solutions to this issue will involve the right balance of healthcare options, community-building solutions and justice-oriented requirements. Drawing on multiple lines of evidence and knowledge systems is essential for a robust and resilient response to this emergency.

# Oversight committee

The SUHES Oversight Committee consists of senior management from Government of Yukon, Council of Yukon First Nations, the Yukon Medical Association and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It is co-chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Community and Primary Care, Department of Health and Social Services, and the Executive Director or delegate of the Council of Yukon First Nations. The committee meets quarterly and is responsible for providing oversight, feedback, and recommendations on SUHES implementation.

SUHES Oversight Committee objectives are to:

- share information and contribute to the ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the SUHES;
- review status updates from the Project Manager, SUHES on the 43 recommended actions contained within the strategy;
- assess the progress of the Implementation Committee and the strategy; and
- identify and consider potential future recommended actions to be included in the strategy and amend or add actions to the strategy, as appropriate.

# Implementation committee

The SUHES Implementation Committee (IC) is by invitation and includes the SUHES Project Manager, representatives from across the Government of Yukon, the Council of Yukon First Nations, RCMP, Blood Ties Four Directions, Thay Ki Anint'i, Yukon Hospital Corporation, and other community partners, as needed. The IC is responsible for leading, coordinating and reporting on the implementation of the strategy's 43 actions.

SUHES Implementation Committee objectives are to:

- inform the group of existing, ongoing and future programs and initiatives to inform the Substance Use Health Emergency;
- collaborate to find common solutions and to reduce duplication of efforts;
- share expertise, resource materials, best practices and information related to harm reduction initiatives;
- identify and pursue partnership opportunities;
- identify system-wide opportunities and address barriers to ensure the response to the health emergency is coordinated and effective; and
- contribute to the ongoing performance measurement and evaluation of the strategy.

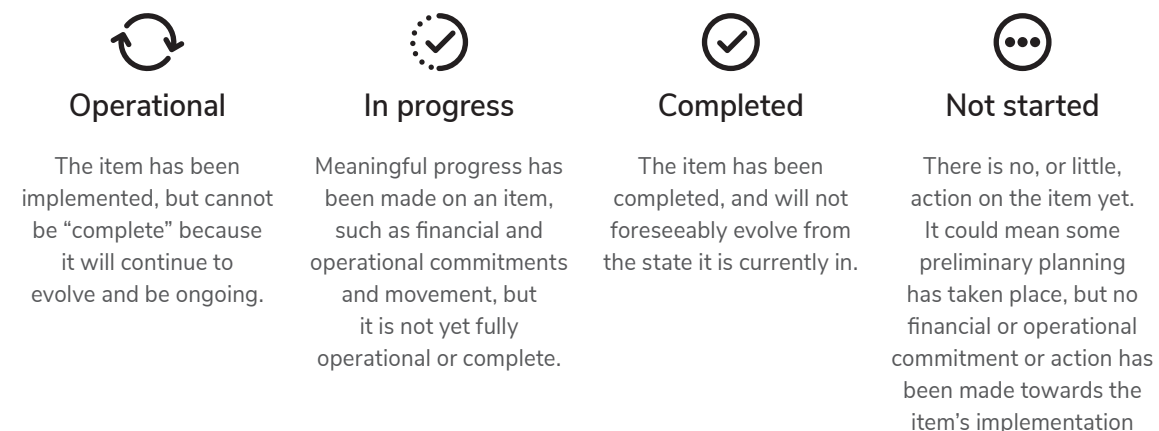
# The four areas of growth



Collectively, actions under these areas of growth will lead us towards the following outcomes:

- Delay age of first substance use
- Minimize substance use across the lifespan
- Increase safety while using substances
- Reduce substance-related harms
- Improve health, safety and wellbeing of Yukoners and Yukon communities.

## What do the status icons of the SUHES report mean?






<sup>1</sup> City of Vancouver. Four Pillars drug strategy. [vancouver.ca/people-programs/four-pillars-drug-strategy](https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/four-pillars-drug-strategy) Progress: Fourteen initial actions

# Progress: fourteen initial actions

Upon release of the SUHES, the Government of Yukon affirmed that this is an emergency and that the strategy contains 43 recommended actions which would take significant time to implement. The Government of Yukon funded collaborative efforts aimed at implementing an initial 14 actions outlined in the strategy. These 14 actions encompass all four areas of growth – prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and community safety and wellbeing.

The following items are not listed in order of priority, but instead correspond to the areas of growth as listed in the SUHES.

The tables below summarize the progress on implementation of these actions.

Area 1: Prevention		
Activity	Status	Next steps/milestone
1 Implement Planet Youth (Icelandic Prevention Model) in Yukon communities		Two pilot sites identified Planning and development beginning in 2025
2 Support Yukon communities in creating and implementing community health and wellness plans		Partnership with CYFN and YG established Travel to communities planned for 2025
3 Continue to launch communication and educational campaigns addressing substance use and mental wellness issues		Several YG and partner-led awareness and educational campaigns active/implemented/upcoming Investigating opportunities to engage with partners



## Area 4: Community safety and wellbeing

Activity	Status	Next steps/milestone
<p>9 Invest in preventing gender-based violence and improving services for victims of crime</p>		<p>Expansion of the existing Sexualized Assault Response Team (SART) is underway.</p> <hr/> <p>Funding from the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence is supporting improved services for victims of gender-based violence.</p> <hr/> <p>In June 2024, the Government of Yukon, in collaboration with the federal government, launched a rent subsidy program to support individuals fleeing gender-based violence.</p>
<p>10 Support individuals grappling with substance use issues when transitioning from the criminal justice system back into communities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) increasing frontline support staffing; and</li> <li>b) creating more safe and sober housing options</li> </ul>	 	<p>The SUHES includes improved supports for those transitioning into the communities through reform of the bail system, including funding for two new positions.</p>
<p>11 Continue to collaborate with Yukon First Nation governments to expand therapeutic courts and other restorative justice approaches in response to substance use-related treatment needs</p>		<p>The SUHES includes funding for a Senior Community Engagement Specialist who will work with Yukon First Nation governments interested in developing or expanding therapeutic courts and other restorative justice approaches.</p> <hr/> <p>Existing restorative justice/therapeutic courts have initiatives including impaired driving, substance use treatment, trauma recovery, intimate partner violence prevention programs for men, healing camps at Jackson Lake and other programming in partnership with First Nations.</p>
<p>12 Support effective and accountable policing and enforcement responsive to community needs while taking into account the Yukon's modern treaty environment</p>		<p>Funding was secured for two new permanent positions to support YG engagement with First Nations regarding issues of jurisdiction and the authority for enforcement of First Nation laws, as well as other justice-related issues.</p>
<p>13 Expand the capacity of the Mobile Crisis Response Team (Car 867)</p>		<p>The initiative pairs trained regular RMCP members with nurses to provide real-time assessment of individuals in crisis and connect clients to support systems.</p> <hr/> <p>The program is now running 7 days/week, 10 hours/day.</p> <hr/> <p>Car 867 conducts follow-up on calls that occur outside their operational hours when a regular RCMP member refers the case to the Car 867 team for further action.</p>
<p>14 Increase the Government of Yukon's capacity to investigate and for civil remedies to disrupt the distribution of toxic illicit drugs and organized crime in Yukon communities</p>		<p>The action is implemented through the existing Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods (SCAN) Unit.</p> <hr/> <p>SUHES funding includes one additional investigator for the SCAN Unit, who was recruited in 2023.</p>

## Other



Activity	Status	Next steps/milestone
15 Hiring SUHE strategy implementation project manager	✔ as of January 7, 2024.	<p>This role will coordinate future committees, update progress on yearly reports and gather feedback from stakeholders, including People With Lived Experience.</p> <p>This role will also provide project management oversight and coordination with program areas, and be a conduit between HSS and other departments and stakeholders who have actions underway. This includes working with communications staff to ensure public awareness on the substance use emergency is maintained, and that updates on the living document are gathered and shared.</p>





## Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy progress

While the primary implementation focus has been the 14 initial actions, work has also begun on many of the remaining actions in the SUHES. Government of Yukon staff have begun to engage stakeholders in a process for evaluating the SUHES. This process is providing information to link initiatives that are already underway and to leverage existing investments, assets and resources to advance the SUHES actions.

This process is also identifying actions of partners outside of the Government of Yukon that are contributing substantively to meeting the goals of the SUHES. It is determining what additional actions are needed to support advancing the SUHES as a 'living document'.



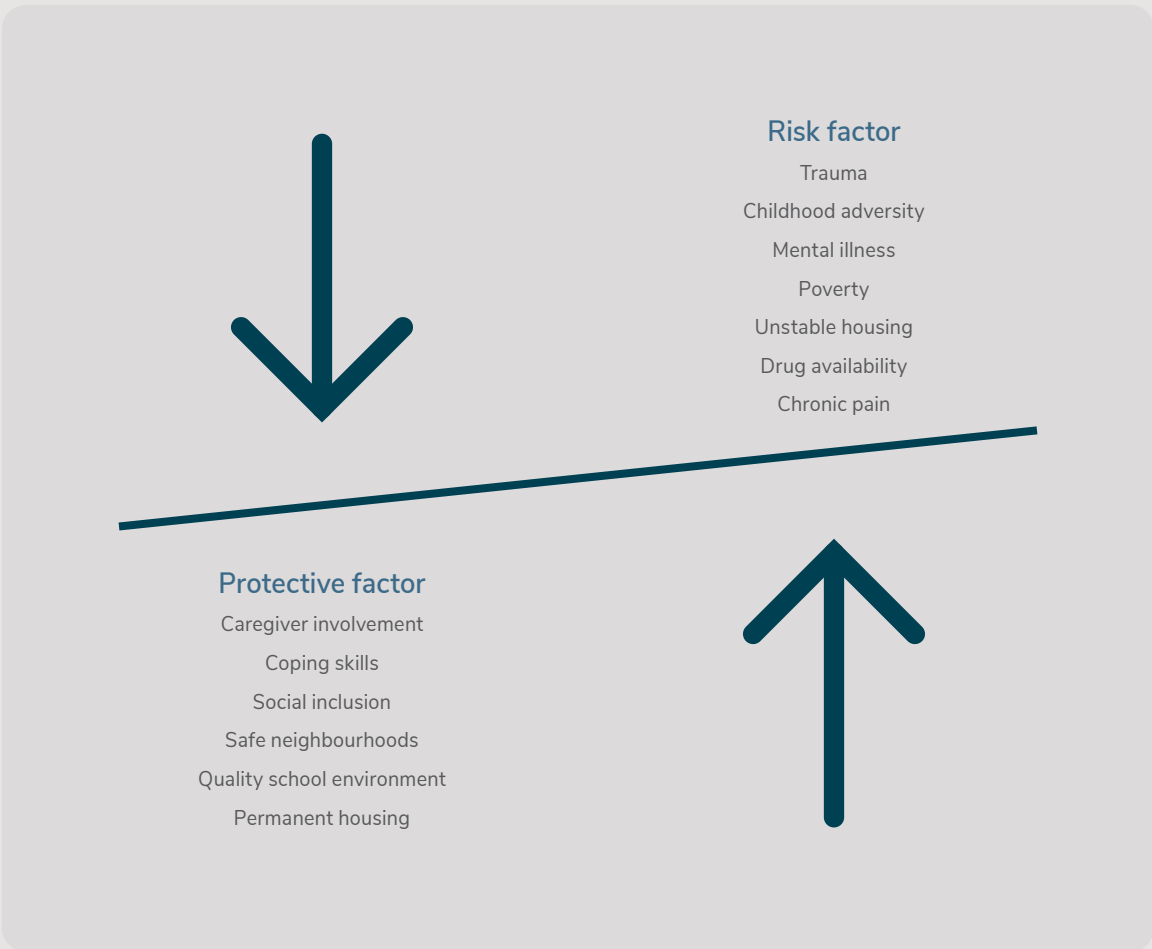
## Area 1: Prevention

Prevention, as it relates to substance use, involves activities and measures aimed at preventing, reducing and delaying the use of substances. Evidence-based prevention approaches support individuals and families to lead healthier and more connected lives. Actions under the area of prevention focus on:

- education and awareness;
- early interventions;
- strengthening protective factors; and
- reducing risk factors.

To be effective, prevention initiatives must focus on actions that increase positive protective factors while decreasing or mitigating risk factors. Policy and programming aimed at prevention are most effective when they target upstream risk and protective factors, and take a multi-pronged approach.

### Risk and protective factors for substance use related harm



Source: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, "Drugs and Age: Drugs and Associated issues among young people and older people." World Drug Report 2018.

## Prevention actions

1.1. <b>Implement</b> Planet Youth in Yukon communities	
1.2. <b>Support</b> Yukon communities in creating and implementing community wellness plans	
1.3. <b>Initiate</b> planning for the co-location of child and youth health services	
1.4. <b>Increase</b> substance use and mental wellness education programs for all Yukon youth	
1.5. <b>Increase</b> partnerships for youth prevention initiatives	
1.6. <b>Continue</b> to support and work with partners on initiatives related to Indigenous mental health	
1.7. <b>Expand</b> life promotion (suicide prevention) initiatives	
1.8. <b>Develop</b> and offer training to all health and social service providers in the Yukon that focuses on cultural safety in service provision and the legacy of intergenerational trauma from residential schools	
1.9. <b>Build</b> a lifecycle approach to mental wellness into all health and social services delivered by the Government of Yukon	
1.10. <b>Increase</b> partnerships for family-based initiatives, particularly those targeting the first five years of life	
1.11. <b>Explore</b> options for the provision of housing and support for parents living with addiction	
1.12. <b>Expand</b> efforts to prevent alcohol-related harms by ensuring that new regulations under the Liquor Act balance the needs of businesses and communities	
1.13. <b>Continue</b> to launch communication and educational campaigns addressing substance use and mental wellness issues	
1.14. <b>Increase</b> support for Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder diagnosis and treatment	
1.15. <b>Continue</b> to explore and implement initiatives and funding models in support of high-quality early learning and child care programs in all Yukon communities	

## Prevention highlights

### The Child, Youth and Family Treatment Team (CYFTT)

provides a range of free counselling and support services for school-aged children, youth and families in the Yukon.

Some examples of programs include:

- group support programs for ADHD;
- parenting support;
- anxiety and depression support; and
- individual counselling.

In April 2024, a Youth Outreach Clinic pilot project was launched to offer friendly, confidential, low-barrier health and wellness services for youth in Whitehorse aged 12-18. The clinic provides client centred, youth friendly, culturally safe, trauma-informed care that is integrated within community health and wellness services and resources. The clinic strives to acknowledge and address systemic racism and the impacts of colonization on clinical care. The clinical operations are transparent, shareable, evidence-based and responsive to evaluation.

Aligns with actions: **1.3** **1.4** **1.5** **1.6** **1.7** **1.10** **1.14**

For more information: Cameron Grandy, Director, Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, [cameron.grandy@yukon.ca](mailto:cameron.grandy@yukon.ca)

### Yukon First Nations Counselling Program

The Council of Yukon First Nations has increased its capacity to offer free and low-barrier counselling to Yukon First Nations clients and now supports a roster of seven Indigenous counsellors. Counsellors have specialties in arts-based therapy, working with youth, trauma and other psychological services. In 2023–24, counsellors offered 2625 hours of support.

For more information: contact Family Preservation Intake at [family.preservation@cyfn.net](mailto:family.preservation@cyfn.net) or call 867-393-9200 ext. 9273

Aligns with actions: **1.6** **1.7** **3.9** **4.10**

### Spotlight: BYTE – Empowering Youth Society

Established in 1998, BYTE is a “by youth, for youth” organization that focuses on empowering and promoting youth throughout the Yukon and Canada’s north. Their community outreach team travels throughout the Yukon and to some areas of Northern BC and NWT to deliver innovative and relevant workshops to northern youth. BYTE also hosts events and conferences that foster youth creativity and culture.

BYTE invests in protective factors for wellness to ensure young people feel seen, heard and valued. They do this by creating spaces where youth can discover and express their unique identities in supportive environments while building relationships with both adults and peers. Programming and workshops teach and model life and leadership skills through a youth perspective.

#### BYTE’s mission

We create spaces for northern youth to create connections, find wellness, and lead their communities. We do this by:

- fostering spaces and relationships where youth feel seen, validated and connected;
- offering pathways for employment and leadership; and
- amplifying youth voices for change.

#### BYTE’s vision

To create a future in the North where young people:

- are validated and celebrated for their unique voices and expressions in their personal and professional lives.
- have a sense of belonging, identity and acceptance within their community and strong relationships with peers and adults; and
- have the tools they need to follow their passions and trailblaze change in their communities.

#### For more information

[yukonyouth.com](http://yukonyouth.com)



## Area 2: Harm reduction








Harm reduction is a public health strategy aimed at minimizing the negative outcomes of substance use, while enhancing protective factors. It does not require the individuals stop using substances, rather it focuses on reducing the health, social and economic harms related to substance use. Harm reduction measures provide opportunities for clients to access life-saving Opioid Agonist Therapies, medications for alcohol use disorder, support for safe substance use and other health care measures that can mitigate the negative effects of substance use.

Actions under the area of harm reduction include those focused on:

- safer use practices;
- access to services and supports; and
- education and information.

## Harm reduction actions

- 2.1. **Implement** a managed alcohol program 
- 2.2. **Expand** access to Opioid Treatment Services, including safer supply and Opioid Agonist Therapy 
- 2.3. **Extend** the operating hours of Whitehorse's Supervised Consumption Site 
- 2.4. **Expand** access to drug checking and harm reduction supplies in line with community wellness plans 
- 2.5. **Increase** naloxone availability where people use substances 
- 2.6. **Promote** alternative ways to keep people safe while using drugs 
- 2.7. **Open** a sobering centre 
- 2.8. **Open** a sober shelter 

## Highlights under harm reduction

### Blood Ties Four Directions

Established in 1993 as the AIDS Yukon Alliance, Blood Ties Four Directions has evolved over time in response to the needs of their clients. Today, Blood Ties delivers a range of harm reduction and social services including access to naloxone kits and overdose prevention and response education; safer use equipment and training in safer use practices; lay counseling; housing navigation and outreach; wellness programming; referrals to health and social supports and services, such as withdrawal management services, treatment services, cultural supports and counselling. In addition to programs and services, Blood Ties also operates the Supervised Consumption Site, available 7 days a week including holidays from 10:30 am to 9:30 pm, which provides a safe and confidential space for people to consume substances. Friendly and non-judgmental staff are available to respond to overdoses, provide drug checking services, administer first aid care, refer people to additional supports and services, and provide access to and education on naloxone and safer use kits. As of July 2024, 84 overdoses have been reversed onsite.<sup>3</sup>

Aligns with actions: **1.6** **1.13** **2.3** **2.4** **2.5** **2.6**

For more information visit: [bloodties.ca](https://bloodties.ca)

### Outreach Van

A partnership between Blood Ties Four Directions, Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon (FASSY) the outreach van offers mobile community outreach in Whitehorse. Services include distribution of harm reduction supplies, needle exchange, drug testing strip checking, winter clothes distribution, snacks and warm beverages, and hygiene supplies. In addition to these services, the van employs outreach nurses through Kwanlin Dün Health Centre to assist clients with referrals and health advocacy. The outreach nurses provide onsite wound care, infection testing and treatment and health education. Between April 1, 2023 and April 1, 2024 1,868 unique individuals used the van's services 8,920 times.

Aligns with actions: **1.6** **1.13** **2.3** **2.4** **2.5** **2.6**

<sup>3</sup> Blood Ties Four Directions annual report.

### Community Outreach Services – COS

Centred in a culture of compassion, clients' self-determination and empowerment, Community Outreach Services uses harm reduction and housing first approaches to deliver culturally responsive, trauma-informed client-centered care. The team consists of a community liaison coordinator, social workers and outreach staff and they support some of the Yukon's most vulnerable individuals. They address complex needs like housing instability, substance use and mental health challenges through intensive case management and outreach, meeting clients where they are and empowering them to achieve their goals. Since 2017, the team has excelled in liaising with community partners to support clients to explore and obtain housing, advocating for clients and breaking down systemic barriers to essential services. Their strong partnerships with non-governmental organizations and community agencies enable them to provide comprehensive support, especially during critical transitions from correctional facilities or treatment services. The addition of a library outreach worker in March 2024 has expanded their impact, helping to address substance use issues and supporting individuals at the Whitehorse Public Library.

Aligns with actions: **1.6** **4.10**

For more information, contact Community Outreach Services at 867-667-3205.

### Paramedic Specialist Program

The Paramedic Specialist Program at 405 Alexander Street has been in place since October 2019. This program provides access to Primary Care Paramedics with an expanded scope of practice with a focus on chronic diseases, mental health and addictions, drug checking and education, and responding to emergencies in 405 Alexander. The program has seen a decrease in 911 ambulance responses to 405 Alexander of upwards of 40% compared to before the program was implemented and provides spectrometry drug checking and fentanyl take home kits upon request.

Aligns with actions: **1.6** **2.4** **2.5**

### Referred Care Clinic (RCC) and Opioid Treatment Services Clinic (OTS)

The Referred Care Clinic is an integrated care clinic, operating under Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services (MWSUS) since 2019, and delivers wrap-around services for vulnerable adults with complex mental health or substance use challenges who do not have a primary care provider and may rely on outreach services to successfully receive care.

Yukoners who use opioids may self-refer to the OTS program and receive treatment to manage or recover from opioid use, as well as access to naloxone kits, harm reduction supplies and education. RCC does not offer drug-checking services but distributes harm reduction supplies which may include drug checking equipment (fentanyl strips).

Safer supply, as it is utilised at the OTS clinic, is the use of prescribed alternatives to the dangerous illicit drug supply as a step on people's treatment journey. Safer supply is one of many evidence-based harm reduction options for people who use drugs, by offering pharmaceutical alternatives to the unregulated drug supply. In developing this program in the Yukon, clinicians at the Referred Care Clinic (RCC) toured and developed relationships with similar clinics across Canada and received recommendations based on the Yukon's unique substance use context, informed by a needs assessment provided by a third party, clinical experience obtained working in the Yukon, and data from the RCC and Yukon Hospitals.

An ongoing relationship with SAFER – a safe supply organization in Victoria, as well as consultation from communities of practice nationwide, help provide expertise and input as the picture in the Yukon evolves. Safer Supply is provided within the context of the wraparound supports, including counselling, transportation and access to other medical services available at the OTS clinic.

Early evaluation data shows increased stabilization of both addictions and mental health concerns for clients in this program. With wraparound supports in place and stabilization in their lives, some clients even choose to stop their use of substances altogether. In the ongoing struggle to save lives during the Substance Use Health Emergency in the Yukon, clinicians need every single tool in their toolbox to ensure no more lives are lost to overdose.

Aligns with actions: [2.2](#) [2.4](#) [2.5](#) [2.6](#)

For more information, or to book an appointment, phone: 867-668-2552.



### Area 3: Treatment and recovery support

Treatment and recovery support is a broad area that covers a range of services – from live-in treatment centres and land-based healing camps – to employment training, counselling, relapse prevention and supportive housing. Supports under this area often overlap with the other areas of prevention and harm reduction as individuals access programs and services at different points in their lives.

#### **Benefits of peer support** <sup>4,5</sup>

Peer-led programming and supports in substance use services bring many benefits to harm reduction, treatment and recovery. People With Lived Experiences can offer unique support and understanding that professionals might lack. This connection can lead to stronger bonds, increased engagement and a greater sense of community among participants, all of which are crucial for successful recovery.

Additionally, peer-led programs can bridge gaps in traditional substance use services by addressing barriers related to stigma and mistrust. People in recovery may feel more comfortable and less judged when talking to peers who have faced similar struggles. This peer support can help reduce feelings of isolation and encourage individuals to seek help and stay committed to their recovery journey. Seeing peers succeed in their recovery can also inspire and motivate others, showing that recovery is possible.

<sup>4</sup> Mericle, A. A., Mahoney, E., Korcha, R., Delucchi, K., & Polcin, D. L. (2019). Sober living house characteristics: A multilevel analyses of factors associated with improved outcomes. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 98, 28–38. [doi-org.ezproxy.uas.alaska.edu/10.1016/j.jsat.2018.12.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2018.12.004)

<sup>5</sup> Lo Sasso, A. T., Byro, E., Jason, L. A., Ferrari, J. R., & Olson, B. (2012). Benefits and costs associated with mutual-help community-based recovery homes: The Oxford House model. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 35(1), 47–53. [doi-org.ezproxy.uas.alaska.edu/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2011.06.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2011.06.006)

### Treatment and recovery support actions

3.1. <b>Expand</b> options for live-in treatment so that Yukoners can access a full continuum of care	⋮
3.2. <b>Explore</b> in-territory models of youth and family treatment with an aim to develop local programs and services	⋮
3.3. <b>Increase</b> financial accessibility of treatment medications for addiction	✓
3.4. <b>Ensure</b> the availability of Opioid Agonist Therapy wherever Yukoners seek assistance	✓
3.5. <b>Explore</b> options for the creation of a rapid access addiction medicine clinic	✓
3.6. <b>Ensure</b> access to education for Yukon clinicians managing chronic pain and assure greater access to non-opioid pain therapies where suitable	⋮
3.7. <b>Increase</b> housing options in the territory	✓
3.8. <b>Increase</b> support for Yukon First Nations governments to develop and implement land-based mental health and substance use treatment options	✓
3.9. <b>Invest</b> in community-based recovery initiatives	✓
3.10. <b>Develop</b> a central online, accessible substance use treatment option directory	✓

## Highlights

### The Opioid Treatment Services (OTS) Clinic at Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services and Safer Supply

Opiate Use Disorder (OUD) is a serious medical condition, where people become physically and psychologically reliant on the use of opioids. Some people start using opioids for different reasons. Some people have chronic pain and are provided prescriptions to help with the pain, and then become reliant on these medications. Some people start using opioids for other reasons, including a history of trauma or mental health challenges.

All people who struggle with OUD are members of our community who face a severe and potentially life-threatening medical challenge. They deserve access to the entire spectrum of evidence-based treatments overseen and managed by experienced addictions clinicians. Recovery from this disorder without the use of lifesaving Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) medications, such as methadone, Kadian, sublocade and suboxone, has an extremely low success rate.

The OTS clinic provides access to experienced addictions clinicians, including doctors, nurse practitioners, registered and licensed practical nurses, and many other wraparound supports such as support workers and social workers. This dedicated and specialised team ensures people are met where they are on their journey with OUD, no matter where someone is when they seek help.

Aligns with actions: **2.2** **3.3** **3.4** **3.5**

For more information, call Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services at 867-456-3838

### Rapid Access Counselling

Rapid Access Counselling is available to all Yukoners. The service provides one targeted counselling session for people living with – or supporting someone living with – a substance use or mental health challenge. During the appointment, the counsellor will assist the client in determining what supports are available. A variety of individual and group counselling services exist and support is available while waiting for longer-term options.

Aligns with actions: **1.6** **1.7** **1.14** **3.9**

For more information call 1-866-456-3838 or 867-456-3838 to make a counselling appointment within three business days.

### Land-Based Healing Fund

Announced in November 2023 and administered by CYFN, the Land-based Healing Fund provides \$7.25 million in funding to Yukon First Nations and Yukon First Nation-led organizations over two years to March 31, 2026. This initiative funds land-based programs that promote healing and wellness with the aim of helping individuals connect to the land, traditional teachings, culture and each other. The first funding intake resulted in nearly 40 approved applications, including 11 to Yukon First Nation governments.

Aligns with actions: **1.6** **3.8** **4.10**

#### Guiding principles of Land-Based Healing

- Foster connections within communities and promote traditional values for land-based programming.
- Focus on culturally safe programming.
- Incorporate community-based programming that fosters collaborations.
- Improve the quality of life of individuals, families and communities.
- Build from the strengths and resources of the community to create local expertise.
- Focus on improvement within various determinants of health such as self-determination, cultural values, life skills, connection with land and fostering healthy relationships.
- Contribute to a quality health continuum of care, including prevention, treatment and recovery.

### Spotlight: Thay K'i Anint'i

Winner of the 2023 Arctic Inspiration Prize, Thay K'i Anint'i (TKA) is a peer-run, grassroots organization dedicated to providing wellness and substance-use recovery programs for Yukoners and their families. Founded in 2022, in response to the urgent need for culturally inclusive, community-based aftercare services, TKA is a beacon of hope and support for individuals on their paths to healing and recovery.

TKA uses a unique “two-eyed seeing” approach, blending Indigenous cultural practices with Western recovery methods to offer a holistic model of care. This approach helps bridge the gap in the aftercare sector, ensuring individuals receive comprehensive and meaningful support throughout their recovery journeys.

The organization is centred around on-the-land programming, family reconciliation, and peer support through relationship-building. In the spring of 2024, with support from Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, Thay K'i Anint'i opened its first physical location in Downtown Whitehorse. This space offers a variety of programs, drop-in services, and recovery support activities, both in the city and on the land, emphasizing the importance of community and cultural connections.

A major milestone in TKA's growth has been the training of 20 recovery coaches in July 2024. These newly trained coaches, from communities across the territory, will provide peer support and guidance to individuals in recovery. With their lived experience and professional training, they offer vital resources and hope to those facing challenges on their recovery journeys.

In recognition of International Overdose Awareness Day on August 31, TKA hosted a weekend healing retreat from August 30-September 1, 2024. The event took place at Airport Lake, near Carmacks, and brought together community partners, government officials and individuals with lived experience. The weekend featured keynote speeches and discussions with stakeholders, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts in building strong, sustainable recovery networks across the territory.

Also in the summer of 2024, TKA joined the SUHES implementation committee, furthering their involvement in shaping recovery services and ensuring their voice and expertise are part of the strategy moving forward. Their participation strengthens the SUHES' ability to advocate for culturally informed, peer-driven solutions that address the needs of those in recovery across the territory.

Aligns with actions **1.5** **1.6**

For more information visit: [thay-ki-aninti.com](https://thay-ki-aninti.com)

## Spotlight: Shāwthän Näzhì: Healing With The Land Society

### Calling Our Spirit Home - Recovery Support Program

Launched as a pilot program in the fall of 2020, Shāwthän Näzhì provides land-based healing for First Nation families. Their recovery support program – Calling Our Spirit Home – includes traditional and Western teachings and practices, animal and equine therapy, arts and play therapy, energy healing and counselling. In addition to recovery programming, Shāwthän Näzhì offers a year-long healing program for First Nation families, as well as customized wellness programs for front-line teams. All programs focus on building resilience and self-empowerment, helping participants become active agents in their own healing.

Aligns with actions **1.5** **1.6** **1.10** **3.1** **3.2** **3.9** **4.10**

For more information visit: [shawthannazhi.ca](http://shawthannazhi.ca)



## Area 4: Community safety and wellbeing

The Department of Justice and its partners are working to support, maintain and increase safety and wellbeing in Yukon communities through systemic and local changes. As every community in the Yukon is a unique blend of its history, landscape and citizens, the needs of each community differ. The goal within area four is to support safety initiatives that are tailored to each community, building on its existing strengths and meeting its individual needs. As the landscape of crime and community safety concerns evolve, our response must change with it.

### Community safety and wellbeing actions:

- 4.1. **Provide** funding to Yukon First Nations governments and local governments to increase understanding of community-specific and territory-wide community safety issues, needs, and priorities, and explore options for long-term solutions to implement identified priorities 
- 4.2. **Develop** a short-term funding stream to support non-governmental organizations and community groups to implement their own responses to safety and wellbeing issues 
- 4.3. **Invest** in preventing gender-based violence and improving services for victims of crime 
- 4.4. **Support** individuals grappling with substance use issues when transitioning from the criminal justice system back into communities by:
  - a) increasing frontline support staffing; and 
  - b) creating more safe and sober housing options 
- 4.5. **Collaborate** with Yukon First Nations governments to expand therapeutic courts and other restorative justice approaches in response to substance use-related treatment needs 
- 4.6. **Support** effective and accountable policing and enforcement responsive to community needs and taking into account Yukon’s modern treaty environment 
- 4.7. **Expand** the capacity of the Mobile Crisis Response Team (Car 867) 
- 4.8. **Increase** territorial capacity to conduct criminal investigations and for civil remedies to disrupt the distribution of toxic illicit drugs and organized crime in Yukon communities 
- 4.9. **Gather** evidence and consider options for the enforcement of criminal law in the Yukon to allocate limited territorial policing resources to most effectively address violence in communities, the poisoning of illicit drugs sold to vulnerable people, and organized crime 
- 4.10. **Invest** in supporting Yukon youth, families, and communities 



## Highlights

### Community Safety Planning

The Government of Yukon's Community Safety Planning Program supports Yukon First Nation governments to enhance safety in their communities in ways that best suit their needs. Yukon First Nation governments can receive up to \$200,000 for initiatives focused on community safety and wellbeing planning and implementation. Funding under this program is available until 2030 to ensure Yukon First Nation governments can develop safety and wellbeing approaches based on their community priorities and needs.

Aligns with actions: [4.1](#) [4.10](#)

### Gender-based violence rent subsidy

In June 2024, the Yukon and federal governments launched the gender-based violence stream of the Canada-Yukon Housing Benefit. The program – administered by Yukon Housing Corporation – will provide more than \$2 million in rent subsidies annually to help survivors of gender-based violence find and maintain safe housing.

Aligns with actions [4.3](#) [4.10](#)

### Car 867

The Mobile Crisis Response Team – also known as Car 867 – is a collaboration between the Government of Yukon and the Yukon RCMP. Car 867 provides client-centred, trauma-informed emergency responses to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis helping to reduce unnecessary interactions with hospital and criminal justice systems. Originally started as pilot project, Car 867 now operates in Whitehorse 10 hours a day, seven days a week.

Aligns with actions [1.5](#) [1.7](#) [4.7](#)

## Moccasin Mobile Outreach

In February 2024, the Council of Yukon First Nations, with support from the Government of Yukon, launched the Moccasin Mobile Outreach van. This service was launched as part of the Downtown Safety Action Plan and is part of an overall strategy to provide supports and enhance safety in downtown Whitehorse. The outreach staff promote wellness, safety and connection through low barrier supports to those in need in the Whitehorse downtown core. All staff are Indigenous and trained to offer emotional and culturally-appropriate support.

The van runs from 8 pm to 2 am Wednesday to Saturday and provides clothing essentials, harm reduction supplies, snacks, hot beverages, first aid and referrals to other services. This initiative aims to create a safer and healthier community by addressing people's immediate needs and fostering trust and connection of those seeking supports in downtown Whitehorse.

Aligns with actions 1.6 2.4 3.9 4.2

### Moccasin Mobile Outreach

Between April 1 and September 30, 2024, the Moccasin Mobile Outreach van had a total of 5,000 client interactions which included providing:

- 1500 food items
- 7000 beverages
- 1000 harm reduction items
- 3000 hygiene items
- 3000 clothing items





# Related strategies and plans

Some strategies and plans relevant to the SUHES include, but are not limited to:

- Putting People First
- Territorial Youth Strategy
- Canadian Drugs and Substance Use Strategy
- Creating Home 5-year strategic plan
- Downtown Whitehorse Safety Response Action Plan
- Aging in Place Action Plan
- Yukon's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit+ People Strategy
- Coroner's inquest update – April 2024
- National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence
- The Yukon's 2023-2025 Policing Priorities
- 2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusion Action Plan

These strategies and plans are related to the SUHES through addressing common risk factors and determinants of substance use, and by having overlapping areas of concern and common goals. It will be important to monitor activities and understand where partners and collaborators can provide support to ensure we are working together in the best way possible towards a healthy future for Yukoners.

## Looking forward

In the coming years, we will continue to collaborate with Yukon First Nation governments and organizations, community partners and other stakeholders as we work to advance our response to the Substance Use Health Emergency.

An ongoing priority of the SUHES is the development of community health and wellness plans (CHWP). Over the next two years, the SUHES team will work with communities to develop CHWPs through community engagement with health and social services providers, non-governmental organizations, Yukon First Nation governments, private sector providers and other government partners. CHWPs will help to inform the future direction of the SUHES.

Another key aspect of the strategy is the focus on community safety. We have heard Yukoners' concerns about the trafficking of illegal substances. We understand that community safety is complex, context-specific and critical to the wellbeing of all Yukoners. As such, we are committed to providing a comprehensive response, including addressing gender-based violence, improving services for victims of crime, increasing capacity to investigate and address the distribution of toxic illicit drugs and taking restorative justice approaches. Our approach is not a rigid action plan but a flexible framework. This flexibility enables us to adapt based on feedback, emerging evidence and evolving priorities. By working closely with communities and understanding their specific needs, we can develop targeted interventions that are more likely to be effective and accepted by the communities we serve.

## Get in touch

We recognize that not all programs and services related to the Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy are mentioned in this report. It is important to note that initiatives do not have to clearly state they are linked to the strategy to be aligned with these goals. If your project or organization has elements that support these efforts, please reach out. Your work is valuable and we welcome the opportunity to collaborate and support our shared goals.

Email: [suhes@yukon.ca](mailto:suhes@yukon.ca)







Yukon