



YUKON'S OPIOID ACTION PLAN

**Health and Social Services
November 2018 - December 2020**

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Contents

- YUKON'S OPIOID ACTION PLAN..... 1
- Message from Minister of Health and Social Services And the Chief Medical Officer of Health... 3
- Health and Social Services Opioid Action Plan: 4 Pillars 5
 - 1. Harm Reduction and Take-Home Naloxone Kits 5
 - 2. Public Awareness and Education..... 6
 - 3. Opioid surveillance..... 8
 - 4. Opioid Pain Management 8
 - Background..... 8
 - Work Plan..... 8
- Next Steps 13



Message from Minister of Health and Social Services And the Chief Medical Officer of Health

The Government of Yukon has been actively engaged on the opioid issue since 2016 when fentanyl overdose first became a concern in the territory. Since then, the government has acted swiftly, adapting to new information and changing needs as they have become apparent.

Under the recommendation and leadership of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, in 2017 the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) supported the establishment of four working groups. These working groups focused on harm reduction, public awareness, surveillance, and improved addictions and pain management. We have worked closely, and continue to ensure collaboration on this important issue across the Department of Health and Social Services, including Community Nursing and Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services branches, our evolving mental wellness and substance use hubs and enhanced mental wellness staff in the communities as well as the Referred Care Clinic in Whitehorse. We have developed strong partnerships with a broad array of other departments and organizations. Yukon government partners include the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, Department of Community Services, Department of Justice and the Department of Education. We are working with federal government departments such as Health Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Our non-governmental partners include the Yukon Medical Association, Yukon Medical Council, Yukon Registered Nurses Association, Yukon Pharmacists Association, Yukon Hospital Corporation, RCMP, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Council of Yukon First Nations, Blood Ties Four Directions, Many Rivers Outreach Van, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon (FASSY), and Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH).

We are focusing on both the supply and demand side of opioids, continuously seeking information to provide a fuller picture of what we are seeing in Yukon. We remain vigilant, trying to ensure that changes in prescribing practices do not push desperate people to seek relief from the illicit drug market.

This work challenges many of us to re-examine assumptions about mental health, addictions, pain, and harm reduction. Changing beliefs and attitudes take time. Learning to meet people where they are, both physically and emotionally, stretches many people who find themselves involved in this work. We are witnessing some hopeful changes.

Throughout our work, we have welcomed formal and informal feedback, including during the conference [Preventing and Managing Opioid Addiction/Misuse Through Innovative Models of Care](#) held in the spring of 2017. Such valuable contributions have shaped, and continue to inform this iterative Health and Social Services Yukon Opioid Action Plan.

Below is a summary of our work to date. It outlines what we have accomplished, and project activities for the next two years. Ultimately, however, the opioid crisis is demanding -- from each of us -- a whole of Yukon response.

We need to redefine emergency response from bystanders and professionals alike. We need physicians to undertake and adhere to new prescribing standards for opioid agonist therapy. We need to enhance access to evidence-based, non-pharmacological approaches to pain management.

In addition, service provision needs to improve to be sensitive to whether clients are struggling with pain, mental health, and/or experiencing trauma. Our response must be rooted in a trauma informed care approach that is culturally relevant and respectful.

Community supports should be readily available for people in distress who are at risk for substance use becoming a dangerous coping strategy for physical and/or psychological pain. For people who are using illicit drugs, we can help them to make more [informed choices](#).

We remain immensely grateful for the countless hours our partners have collaborated to respond to this public health crisis. We look forward to working with all of our partners over the next two years as we continue our multi-pronged Yukon [opioid response](#).



Dr. Brendan Hanley, MD CCFP (EM) MPH
Chief Medical Officer of Health



Honourable Pauline Frost,
Minister of Health and Social Services

Health and Social Services Opioid Action Plan: 4 Pillars

1. Harm Reduction and Take-Home Naloxone Kits

A commitment to the principles of first aid and harm reduction characterizes our Take-Home Naloxone program.

To date, Yukon Government and partners have:

- ✓ Distributed over 1900 take-home naloxone kits throughout Yukon, offering individuals and providers the ability to deliver urgent care to those experiencing an opioid overdose. Kits and training are available without a prescription to anyone in Yukon who is concerned about the risks associated with their own drug use, or that of someone else;
- ✓ Trained staff in over 45 organizations, including in most schools;
- ✓ Training was provided for 1530 of the kits dispensed, representing nearly 81% of all dispensed kits;
- ✓ Made kits available at 45 locations across the territory;
- ✓ Proactively distributed information at various public locations in advance of events;
- ✓ Provided naloxone kits and trained personnel on site for events;
- ✓ Hired an Opioid Overdose Prevention Coordinator to oversee the distribution, inventory, database, and training for the take-home naloxone kits; and
- ✓ Sought and received a Health Canada exemption to support Blood Ties Four Directions' Fentanyl Drug Checking service.

Over the next 2 years we will:

- Increase targeted harm reduction activities throughout Yukon;
- Develop innovative harm reduction strategies to reduce overdose risk;
- Assess expanding the Fentanyl Drug Checking Services in Yukon;
- Expand the Take-Home Naloxone kit program (outreach, training, kit distribution, and monitoring);
- Reduce barriers for people to obtain and use naloxone kits, and received associated emergency medical attention;
- Enhance substance use education offered throughout Yukon schools;
- Support Blood Ties Four Directions' Fentanyl Drug Checking service;
- Develop approaches for destigmatizing and advancing harm reduction for adults and youth; and
- Educate the public and health care providers on the benefits and evidence supporting harm reduction approaches.

“Under the recommendation and leadership of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Department of Health and Social Services supported the establishment of four working groups:

- 1. harm reduction;*
- 2. public awareness;*
- 3. surveillance; and*
- 4. opioid pain management.”*



2. Public Awareness and Education

Alongside every jurisdiction across Canada, Yukon is promoting awareness around fentanyl. Messages focus on fentanyl risks, knowing overdose signs,

where to pick up a take-home naloxone kit, and calling 911 as soon as an overdose is suspected. Activities and messaging may shift as more/different information becomes available that enables us to better tailor messages for specific audiences.

Building broader public awareness around mental health and addiction as a chronic disease also continues to be a priority.

To date, Yukon government and partners have:

- ✓ Distributed 1,250 phone, wallet and “Party Safe” cards to students in grades 10 to 12;
- ✓ Promoted and consistently updated www.knowyoursource.ca in fentanyl/drug-related communications from Health and Social Services and the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health;
- ✓ Sponsored advertisements in local newspapers, radio stations, TV channels and in busses;
- ✓ Shared information about fentanyl, overdose, and the take-home naloxone kits online and through social media channels;
- ✓ Reminded Yukoners on Facebook and on HSS web page about the free training on how to use take-home naloxone kits held every Wednesday at Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services;
- ✓ Promoted <https://towardtheheart.com/opioid-od-awareness> so individuals can learn how to recognize overdose signs early;
- ✓ Developed and distributed the [Let’s Talk about Fentanyl](#) one pager to better inform Yukoners on fentanyl;
- ✓ Informed students and community members about fentanyl, opioids and take-home naloxone kits through in-person presentations;
- ✓ Shared informational resources such as posters, postcards, and wallet cards across Yukon;
- ✓ Shared knowledge, research, training, and networking opportunities on mental health (e.g., [Mental Wellness Summit](#), October 4-5th, 2017) and regular [Forward Together](#) news notes; and
- ✓ Shared knowledge, research, training, and networking opportunities on understanding addiction as a chronic disease, including the psychosocial supports that constitute treatment (e.g., the conference [Preventing and Managing Opioid Addiction/Misuse Through Innovative Models of Care](#), May 31-June 1, 2017; ongoing email updates to stakeholders.)



Transit advertisement



Fentanyl Information Brochure

Safe Party Brochure

In the next 2 years we will:

- Develop a public awareness strategy about addiction as a chronic disease, rather than a moral failing of the individual, to help decrease stigma related to illicit and/or addicted drug use;
- Distribute new fentanyl-related informational materials for use and distribution around the territory;
- Promote the fentanyl/naloxone awareness campaign (through radio, newspapers and web, social media and posters);
- Educate students in grades 10 to 12 and distribute phone wallet and “Party Safe” cards;
- Enhance the drug awareness campaign delivered in Yukon schools;
- Educate Yukon students about the dangers of illicit drugs like fentanyl with the goal of supporting young people in making good choices, keeping themselves and their peers safe;
- Promote Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services to youth that might need support;
- Develop innovative Public Awareness and Public Engagement campaigns; and
- Promote and share up-to-date resources on mental health, addictions and pain developed by our community partners.
- Leverage our interagency, inter-disciplinary working groups to:
 - develop key messages and approaches for advancing harm reduction;
 - enhance outreach around prevention and harm reduction;
 - promote education and skills for youth to support and help one another;
 - optimize safe, accessible healthcare and counselling for at risk youth;
 - increase parent education; and
 - Expand access to extra-curricular opportunities for youth.

3. Opioid surveillance

We are continually monitoring suspected opioid-related deaths, emergency visits at hospitals, and distribution and use of take-home naloxone kits and we are exploring other sources of information to improve our understanding of opioids use in the territory. We continue to work closely with federal, provincial and territorial colleagues through the [Special Advisory Committee on the Epidemic of Opioid Overdoses](#). This Committee is dedicated to improving opioid surveillance and where appropriate, dissemination of critical information to partners who will better inform overdose prevention, treatment, and harm-reduction efforts in Yukon and across Canada. In short, such information informs all 4 Pillars of Yukon's Opioid Action Plan.

Support from the Public Health Agency of Canada has provided a public health officer from December 2017 to March 2019 to assist in a comprehensive opioid surveillance plan for Yukon. This will allow us to more completely monitor opioid use and overdoses in the territory, and make recommendations to Yukon government departments and partners on surveillance approaches, including eHealth.

Full implementation of the Drug Information System through Health and Social Service's new [eHealth Solutions](#) will also assist in tracking opioid dispensing throughout Yukon.

4. Opioid Pain Management

Background

Established in January 2017, the Opioid Pain Management working group convenes as an expert body with representatives and stakeholders from within and external to government who are involved in opioid medication management and addictions care in Yukon.

The group is identifying specific health and social service reforms that:

- Protect users from addiction harms and overdose;
- Help to improve acute and chronic pain management;
- Protect the community from drug diversion;
- Are adapted to Yukon and rural context; and
- Are culturally relevant and appropriate to First Nations.

Work Plan

The Opioid Pain Management working group is committed to 7 Priority Areas over the next 2 years. These priorities are not independent of each other. They rely on, and influence the degree to which we are able to achieve the others.

The Priority Areas include:

1. Care Delivery/ Service Coordination
2. Prescribing
3. Maintenance/Monitoring
4. Screening
5. Managing High Risk Transitions
6. Prevention
7. Effective Pain Management

For **Care Delivery and Service Coordination** (Priority Area #1), Yukon government and partners have:

- ✓ Consolidated the methadone program with some other substance use services in the Referred Care Clinic Yukon in Whitehorse;
- ✓ Integrated Mental Health Services, Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Services, and Alcohol and Drug Services to increase access to services for our Yukon residents. This ensures that individuals receive timely and appropriate services based on their needs. The new Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services branch implements a collaborative and team-based service delivery model that is offering integrated mental health and addiction supports to individuals throughout the territory, and includes a broader continuum of services to meet more diverse needs;
- ✓ Established consistent community practices based on Canadian [guidelines](#);
- ✓ Educated care providers about the [guidelines](#);
- ✓ Hosted [Preventing and Managing Opioid Addiction/Misuse Through Innovative Models of Care](#) to explore and identify community-based models of care;
- ✓ Shared knowledge, research, training, and networking opportunities on mental health and addictions, including land-based treatment (e.g., [Mental Wellness Summit](#), October 4-5th, 2017) and regular [Forward Together](#) news notes; and
- ✓ Provided coverage for Yukoners without insurance or funding for Suboxone or methadone prescriptions to manage addictions.

In the next 2 years we will:

- Improve rural addiction services and aftercare, ensuring services are delivered in a safe and culturally appropriate manner;

“Throughout our work, we have actively solicited input and listened attentively to Yukon First Nations, stakeholders and the public. Such valuable contributions have shaped, and continue to inform, this iterative Health and Social Services Yukon Opioid Action Plan.”



- Work with the Referred Care Clinic Yukon to build it as a centre of expertise for opioid and addictions care and management. This will help to increase access to opioids, agonist therapies and related social supports;
- Develop and implement robust opioid withdrawal protocols;
- Work towards making opioid agonist treatment available in communities;
- Improve and expand discharge planning from hospitals, corrections, and other services to ensure supports are continuously available for clients in need.
- Integrate service delivery to make navigating addiction treatment easier for clients; and
- Enhance On the Land Healing initiatives and explore options for a Yukon On The Land Collaborative Model, examining how we can provide innovative, outcome-focused culturally based models of care.

For **Prescribing, Maintenance/Monitoring and Screening** (Priority Areas #2-4) Yukon government and partners have:

- ✓ Developed draft clinical guidelines for opioids and opioid agonist therapy, including screening, initiation, maintenance, monitoring and withdrawal. This will ensure that all clients receive coordinated, high quality, evidence-based care with respect to opioid use and pain management, and protect users from exposure to addiction and overdose; and
- ✓ Improved knowledge in addiction management among health care providers, including use of Suboxone (Conference [Session 7: Overview of Addiction Medicine with Detoxification and Stabilization Protocols](#); [Session 1: Suboxone](#); Dr. Elwell's [Suboxone slide presentation](#) to physicians at Whitehorse General Hospital).

In the next 2 years we will:

- Finalize and implement the clinical guidelines;
- Expand education and support for primary care providers;
- Implement a screening protocol for substance use that is consistent across primary care, Community Nursing, Mental Wellness and Substances Use Services and other service providers;
- Build capacity and increase knowledge transfer among health professionals about substance use, addiction and care; and
- Enhance the safety of opioid prescriptions and dispensing through the [Drug Information System](#) in partnership with the Yukon Pharmacists Association and Yukon Medical Council.

For **Managing High Risk Transitions** (Priority Area #5), Yukon government and partners have:

- ✓ Targeted harm reduction activities;
- ✓ Distributed take-home naloxone kits and conducted training with staff at Whitehorse Corrections, Mental Wellness Substances Use Services and hospitals;
- ✓ Made take-home naloxone kits available at 45+ locations throughout Yukon; and
- ✓ Improved coordination between Corrections, Mental Wellness and Substances Use Services and other community supports.

Over the next 2 years we will:

- Amplify targeted harm reduction and intervention coordination across Yukon government and community service providers, including the wellness hubs and other sites in rural Yukon;
- Improve discharge planning from, and transitioning between, all Yukon services and institutions;
- Facilitate communication and coordination among agencies that provide services to high-risk individuals;
- Improve frontline screening for vulnerability and referral to services such as the Take-Home Naloxone Kit program.
- Collaboration with Yukon First Nations and the federal government through the [National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program](#).

“We remain vigilant, trying to ensure that changes in prescribing practices do not push desperate people to seek relief from the illicit drug market.”

For **Prevention** (Priority Area #6) Yukon government and partners have:

- ✓ Developed draft clinical guidelines to ensure that all clients receive coordinated, high quality, evidence-based care with respect to opioid use and pain management and help to protect users from exposure to addiction and overdose;
- ✓ Promoted [public awareness](#) of fentanyl risks, knowing overdose signs, not using alone, and calling 911 when an overdose is suspected;
- ✓ Hired 11 new workers for rural areas (through the Mental Wellness Strategy) focusing on mental wellness and substance use;
- ✓ Improved knowledge about addictions (conference [Session 6: Framing Addictions](#));
- ✓ Improved knowledge around trauma-informed care (conference [Session 1: Trauma Informed Care](#)); and
- ✓ Shared case studies and probed how experiences with youth and community wellness in Northern Ontario might help to inform prevention and treatment in Yukon (Conference [Session 2B: Adolescent Opioid Addiction: High School-Based Suboxone Program](#); [Session 2A: Culture Is An Intervention: Community Wellness & Treatment](#).)

“Community supports should be readily available for people in distress who are at risk for substance use becoming a dangerous coping strategy for physical and/or psychological pain.”



Over the next 2 years, the Harm Reduction and Public Awareness working groups will assume a greater role in prevention initiatives outlined below. Enhancing our partnership with the Department of Education is also a priority as we:

- Improve early screening for trauma and psychosocial stresses;
- Ensure resources are in place for early intervention;
- Expand education and skills for youth to support and help one another;
- Optimize safe, accessible healthcare and counselling for at risk youth;
- Increase parent education;
- Promote and increase access to extra-curricular opportunities for youth;
- Enhance outreach around prevention and harm reduction;
- Identify substance use prevention strategies for both adults and youth;
- Identify opportunities to reduce the amount of expired and/or unused medications circulating in communities through education and “drug take-back” initiatives;
- Support on safe, affordable housing initiatives; and
- Explore establishing a Yukon On the Land Collaborative Model. This is consistent with the Yukon Mental Wellness Strategy which identifies the importance of culture in supporting mental wellness, specifically recognizing culture as an important social determinant of health and acknowledging how Yukon on the land healing programs have benefited both First Nations and non-First Nations people;

For **Effective Pain Management** (Priority Area #7), Yukon government and partners have:

- ✓ Increased access to [evidence-based resources](#) on opioids and pain management health care providers in Yukon;
- ✓ Developed draft clinical guidelines for opioids. This will ensure that all clients receive coordinated, high quality, evidence-based care with respect to opioid use and pain management and protect users from exposure to addiction and overdose by using opioids as a *means to mobility and rehabilitation* (not necessarily a treatment on their own).
- ✓ Galvanised conversation about approaches and access to non-pharmacological pain management ([Session 4: Non-Pharmacological Methods of Treating Pain](#)); and
- ✓ Improved knowledge around the appropriate use of opioids, including how opioids can induce pain. ([Session 9: The Relief That Binds You – Mechanisms of Pain Mediated Through Opioid Use](#)).

“We need to enhance access to evidence-based, non-pharmacological approaches to pain management.”

Over the next 2 years we will:

- ✓ Finalize and implement clinical guidelines;
- ✓ Develop a registry of Yukon-specific non-pharmacological resources for pain management. This will support self-referral, and where appropriate, enable physicians to refer patients;
- ✓ Improve access to evidence-based, non-pharmacological approaches to pain management for all Yukoners;
- ✓ Enhancing multidisciplinary pain expertise and supports in Yukon; and
- ✓ Promote and support appropriate use of opioids for effective pain management.

Next Steps

The “Health and Social Services Opioid Action Plan” will continue to require a community approach, actively engaging citizens, First Nations partners, partner organizations, government departments, and service providers. Our commitment to innovative approaches and evidence-based practice remains. As implementation proceeds, we will continue to be responsive to emerging service delivery needs, as well as changes in knowledge and practice. The Opioid Action Plan offers a tangible path forward.

It inspires participation and optimism for a future in which all Yukoners struggling with physical and/or psychological pain have access to supports where and when they need them. The Plan also reflects our commitment to Yukon youth, ensuring healthy life skills and coping mechanisms are fostered from a young age. We look forward to working with Yukoners and our partners, in advancing this Plan.