



ALBERTA

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Peace River*

AR 1318

Tyler Gandam
President
Alberta Municipalities
300, 8616 51 Ave NW
Edmonton AB T6E 6E6

FEB 0 1 2024

Dear Tyler Gandam:

Thank you for your letter regarding Alberta Municipalities' Resolution 2023-B4, Rural Access to Supports for Addictions, Homelessness and Mental Health.

Good mental health is essential to the well-being of all Albertans. That's why Alberta's government identified improving access to mental health and addiction services as a priority, especially for rural and remote communities across the province. Alberta's government is establishing 11 new recovery communities throughout the province to ensure people with addiction can access life-saving treatment. Two recovery communities opened their doors this year. The Red Deer Recovery Community opened in May and the Lethbridge Recovery Community opened in September. Other recovery communities located in Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Gunn and on Enoch Cree Nation, Siksika Nation, Tsuut'ina Nation and the Blood Nation Reserve lands are in various stages of development. Each of these facilities will offer long-term addiction treatment at no cost to clients.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is responsible for delivering health care in the province and has a number of mental health supports available. AHS' Addiction and Mental Health Clinics provide programs and services in communities across the province. Albertans can find clinic locations on the AHS website at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/Oage14063.aspx>. AHS' Telehealth service provides health-related services and information at a distance using videoconference technology through one of the largest Telehealth networks in North America, as well as a multitude of technology solutions. Telehealth services at local addiction and mental health clinics increase mental health service delivery to rural and remote communities.

Alberta's government is investing in access to virtual mental health and addiction services to support Albertans living in rural and remote locations. Counselling Alberta provides both virtual and in-person mental health counselling services across Alberta. AHS' Virtual Opioid Dependency Program connects individuals to opioid agonist treatment and related treatment supports through videoconferencing with a physician.

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Alberta's government is aware rural homelessness is a growing concern impacting smaller communities across the province. We are paying attention to what communities are sharing and considering next steps.

The Rural Development Network manages the federal homelessness funding in Alberta to assist in addressing the challenges faced by rural communities in providing shelter and support for people who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. The Rural Development Network administers federal funding to support homelessness responses led by municipalities, non-profits, First Nation communities and Metis settlements outside of the seven major cities in Alberta.

The government's Action Plan on Homelessness will continue to provide funding to support rural communities in offering temporary shelter spaces during the winter months. Through the Action Plan on Homelessness, Seniors, Community and Social Services provided \$2 million in 2022-23 to agencies in Slave Lake, Cold Lake, Peace River, Lac La Biche, Edson, Drayton Valley and Leduc to operate over 100 winter emergency shelter spaces. In response to the 2023 wildfires in Alberta, this funding was extended in Cold Lake, Peace River, Lac La Biche, Edson, Drayton Valley and Leduc so agencies could continue to provide shelter services to those in need. Starting in 2023-24, funding will be provided to the town of Slave Lake to operate 20 permanent emergency shelter spaces.

Alberta's government continues to increase access to a recovery-oriented continuum of mental health and addiction services and supports that incorporates prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery. Over the past four years, Alberta's government invested an additional \$344 million to support these efforts, while *Budget 2023* added another \$275 million commitment this year. This direct government funding is in addition to the more than \$900 million AHS spends each year on mental health and addiction services in communities across the province.

By continuing to make targeted investments in recovery-oriented mental health and addiction programs and services, Alberta's government is working to meet the mental health and addiction recovery needs of Albertans. This helps ensure a healthy, strong Alberta for the future.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Williams', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dan Williams, ECA
Minister of Mental Health and Addiction