



## Meeting Highlights – North Zone Health Advisory Councils

Thursday, January 30, 2020 – 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.  
Alberta Health Services – Telehealth

### Welcome and Introductions

---

Maura Beaton, Lead, Advisory Council Relations, welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roundtable of introductions by site, as the meeting was held via video conference.

### AHS North Zone: Status and Priorities

---

Gregory Cummings, Chief Zone Officer, North Zone, and Dr. Albert Harmse, Interim Medical Director, provided an update on North Zone status and priorities. Highlights are as follows:

- Dr. Albert Harmse is the new Interim Medical Director for the North Zone.
- Update on the [Novel Coronavirus](#) (nCoV). There are no confirmed cases in Alberta – AHS is focused on readiness.
- [AHS Review](#) (by Ernst and Young) - AHS has 100 days to respond to recommendations in the review.
- AHS efficiencies include budget and travel restrictions. AHS is limiting overtime to all staff across the province. Operational best practice - ensuring AHS is comparable to other major health care organizations in what it invests in. AHS is employing good decision making tactics.
- Capital Projects update: AHS plans to take over the new Grande Prairie Regional Hospital at the end of June. It will then begin commissioning people and equipment for the new facility. Structured engagement will commence to name the new facility and the minister's office will make the final decision. Willow Square in Fort McMurray is nearing completion. It is the first aging in place complex in the community.

#### **Q. Is there a plan in place if an epidemic/ pandemic comes into Alberta?**

A. AHS has plans in place for in the community, acute care and residential care. AHS infection prevention and control is very experienced in outbreaks and has learned from the SARS outbreak how much Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is required to protect staff and patients. AHS has recent experience with influenza and H1N1 so it has really good safety mechanisms in place. Staff are very well trained to follow appropriate procedures.

#### **Q. Why are there cuts to expenses for volunteers, including Advisory Council members?**

A. All AHS non-clinical staff and volunteers are included in the travel restrictions set until March 31, 2020. Councils will resume business as usual as of April 1.

#### **Q. How can Nurse Practitioners (NP) be utilized more in rural Alberta, where it can be hard to recruit physicians and other medical staff?**

A. Some communities have the opportunity through the Primary Care Network (PCN) to create more positions for NPs. There is no opportunity for NPs to work as independent practitioners as they are unable to bill to Alberta Health Care like physicians. AHS has to be creative in its



recruitment strategies while also creating desirable work environments to bring staff to rural and remote areas.

### **North Zone Addiction and Mental Health Update**

---

Susan Given, Executive Director, Addiction and Mental Health (AMH), North Zone provided an update on addiction and mental health services in the North Zone. Highlights include:

#### **Addiction and Mental Health (AMH) Services in the North Zone:**

- 3 inpatient psychiatry units (40 beds)
- 39 community addiction and mental health clinics and satellite service sites
- 4 opioid dependency treatment clinics
- 8 residential addiction treatment and detoxification services (AHS & Contracted)
- 32 contracted service providers

AHS also partners with:

- 11 Primary Care Networks (PCN)
- 6 Regional Collaborative Service Delivery ([RCSD](#)) regions

#### **North Zone AMH Statistics for 2018/2019:**

- 17,183 emergency department visits for primary AMH diagnosis
- 848 discharges from inpatient psychiatric units
- 1229 adult or youth detoxification service admissions (AHS only including PChAD – protection of children abusing drugs)
- 457 residential addiction treatment admissions (AHS only)
- 20,939 enrolments in Community Addiction and Mental Health services
- 345 active clients in AHS opioid dependency clinics

#### **North Zone Addiction & Mental Health Strategic plan:**

- Decrease suicide and self-harm
- Appropriate use of emergency department
- Transition of care
- Decrease waitlist for community addiction & mental health
- Increase capacity of inpatient units
- Support families and caregivers

#### **Recent accomplishments include:**

Four new opioid clinics; Enhancing Care in the Community (ECC) funding; continuing care capacity projects; foundation partnerships; Patient Centered Care initiatives; community partnerships and collaboration; North Zone Addiction & Mental Health strategic plan refresh, collaborative opioid response strategy development; Community Integration Grants and the [CanReach Project](#).

#### **Unique projects and considerations for the team:**



Fort McMurray and Paddle Prairie wild fire recovery; Health Canada partnerships; Athabasca & Area Rural Opioid Education Project; Headstrong Youth Summit hosted by the Metis First Nation; International Overdose Awareness Day; Valleyview Well-Being Coalition; Drift Pile Wellness Day and Family Violence Prevention Month.

**Q. How is AHS addressing mental health supports for young people – particularly in High Prairie?**

A. Typically there is more demand for mental health services than addiction services; wait times for mental health services can be weeks to months depending on the community. AHS services are as flexible as possible. Walk-in services are available, as needed, in each community, pending staff availability and community need. AHS also has other community resources available for children and youth including partnerships with schools and RCSD. This ensures schools have access to mental health resources. Child and youth tele-psychiatry was also launched in March 2019.

**Q. The High Prairie School District pays for councillors in its schools though it isn't part of RCSD. What supports are available in the community for these councillors to refer students outside of the school?**

A. RCSD is a provincial government initiative to address mental health. Sometimes staff are from AHS and sometimes they are part of the school district. AHS does have addiction and mental health services in High Prairie.

**Q. How are physicians being trained to support patients who are far away from large regional centres?**

A. CanReach offers education and training services to empower primary care providers to know and use the most effective methods for identifying and treating pediatric mental health conditions. AHS is working to partner with PCN physicians who have the interest and capacity to be participants in this project.

**Q. When will findings about the detox beds in the Swan Hills hospital pilot project be available?**

A. AHS is in the process of doing an evaluation on this pilot project. It has been a year of learning and staff are pleased to provide this service in the area.

**Q. What is the plan to transition AMH travel teams out of Fort McMurray after March 31, 2020?**

A. AHS is working with Canadian Red Cross on extending funding for these programs to March 2021. AHS is working on sustainability for services across the board and different funding opportunities to continue this work.

**Q. What is the goal for time management for mental health therapists? Is there a clients per day expectation?**

A. It is very complex work. On a typical day they see 4-6 patients. Lots of times they see clients



for half a day in addition to work with other teams in the hospital or the community supporting them.

**Action items:**

- Susan Given to follow up with Joyce Dvornek and Krista Schuett regarding RCSD services in High Prairie and Grande Prairie.
- Susan Given to follow up with Liz Krawiec with evaluations from pilot project.
- Susan Given to follow up with Danielle Commander to correctly showcase the complexities of the work the AMH team does.

**North Zone Seniors and Continuing Care Update**

---

Robyn Maddox, Executive Director, Seniors Health, North Zone provided an update on Seniors and Continuing Care services in the North Zone. Highlights include:

**Services offered by North Zone Seniors and Continuing Care:**

- Long Term Care
- Designated Supported Living
- Home Care
- Palliative Care
- Complex Care support
- Transition services – access, placement, transition coordination
- Capacity planning and contracting (beds)

**Enhancing Care to Community funding for:**

- Home care growth
- Intensive home care (Grande Prairie)
- Community support (transition coordination)
- Palliative care/complex care
- Respite in congregate settings

**North Zone Community Conversations**

---

Nicole Merrifield, Director, Community Engagement & External Relations, provided an update on the recent North Zone Community Conversations. Highlights are as follows:

- Three Community Conversations were hosted by Community Engagement (CE) and North Zone Health Advisory Councils (HACs) the first week of December 2019 in Peace River, Paddle Prairie and Barrhead.
- 57 community members and leaders joined AHS and the HACs to discuss healthcare challenges and opportunities in their communities.
- The June and December 2019 events built upon information and perspectives gathered at the first 12 Community Conversations. The shift in focus was largely to generate ideas as to how AHS can partner with local leaders and community groups to improve health and wellness.



### Feedback from Participants

Participants who completed the evaluation survey rated the event as good or excellent and agreed or strongly agreed that:

- Their understanding of AHS' focus on wellness, prevention and community care increased.
- Participation and interaction was encouraged.
- They had an opportunity to share thoughts and ideas in a productive way.
- Being at the meeting was a good use of their time.

### Key themes from all Community Conversations held in North Zone:

- Need for improved access to services
- Need for improved continuity of care
- Need for building partnerships in communities.

### What comes next:

The Community Engagement team continues to develop strategies to continue conversations with communities across the province in 2020 using an online engagement tool, [Together4Health](#). The focus of future events will be on partnering with the Zone and HACs to identify opportunities and needs.

### Roundtable

---

The following is a summary of comments from Council Chairs:

- Joy McGregor of Lesser Slave Lake HAC says the availability of youth mental health services in the Lesser Slave Lake area is an ongoing issue. Council is hoping to see the EMS Bay is on the Capital project list with the new budget coming out. She adds there is ongoing concern about the quality of food in hospitals across the province. Lastly, Council hopes to recruit and get connected with the community of Wabasca.
- Krista Schuett is the new Chair for the Peace HAC. The Council is seeking to recruit Indigenous members from the area, something it's working very hard on. She adds AHS has done a great job keeping the public informed with updates on the new Grande Prairie Regional Hospital. She also adds there is concern that there is no oncologist at the Cancer Clinic in Grande Prairie. Finally, continuity of care and access to specialized care in the north is limited.
- Robert Deresh of Lakeland Communities HAC was excited to partner with AHS to co-host two Community Conversations in 2019, one in Smoky Lake and one in Cold Lake. Council enjoyed the opportunity to engage with local community stakeholders. Council is busy working on work plan objectives including: sharing information with local communities about the new Opioid Dependency Program (ODP) in Bonnyville, how EMS is improving services in the area with the addition of a Non Ambulance Transfer (NAT) Van in St. Paul and the new Child and Youth Tele-psychiatry initiative.
- Linda West of Tamarack HAC advises Council was busy hosting Community Conversations in Hinton and Barrhead in 2019. She is grateful CE is providing follow up



as this lets participants know they're being heard. At its November meeting Council held a working session to review and revise the work plan for 2020-2022. She attended the North Zone Service Planning Meeting between the PCN and AHS and its priorities are clear. Priorities across the zone are: addiction and mental health, decreasing emergency room use, transportation and access in rural areas, creating a holistic approach to health and wellness, diversity and inclusion and wellness for staff and clients.

### **Adjournment**

---

The meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Councils are recruiting new members. Anyone interested in applying can do so through the [AHS website](#). View a complete list of [meeting dates](#) for all councils across Alberta.

Learn about the four organizational goals of AHS in the [2017-2020 AHS Health Plan and Business Plan](#).

Join us in changing the conversation from [illness to wellness](#).

Our meetings are open to the public. Dates and locations are [available here](#). [Find your Health Advisory Council here](#). Visit the webpage for more info.

Contact us at: [community.engagement@ahs.ca](mailto:community.engagement@ahs.ca)

Call: 1-877-275-8830