

Alberta Sexually Transmitted
and Blood-Borne Infections

Strategic Framework 2018-2021

Alberta Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections Strategic Framework 2018-2021

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OVERVIEW AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2016, Alberta Health Services (AHS) and numerous stakeholders from across the province began the development of a new sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI) strategy for Alberta. The content in this Framework is a direct result of the hard work done by participants during stakeholder engagements in summer 2016.

Decades of collaboration between the health system and nongovernmental and community organizations in Alberta have led to the availability of the STBBI services and supports to meet the needs of Albertans. This Framework provides a guide to support ongoing planning and to enhance collaboration in the years ahead.

PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

This document provides a policy foundation to guide the health sector and community-level response to STBBI in Alberta. The provincial framework:

- provides a common path to support policy makers, program planners and service providers who are working towards common goals;
- bolsters the collective response to STBBI by assisting health sector and community-level partners focus their the activities, energy and resources;
- guides and supports policy decisions and action plans; and
- serves as a frame of reference to ensure policies, operational decisions and resource allocations are aligned with key priorities.

CONTEXT

In 2011, Alberta Health released the Alberta Sexually Transmitted Infections and Blood Borne Pathogens Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2016. It aimed to address the challenges Alberta was facing with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis C, and sexually transmitted infections (STI) and to prevent, and minimize their impact on the well-being of Albertans.

In 2011, the issues of concern were:

- increased rates of congenital syphilis and its linkage to a lack of appropriate prenatal care;
- increased rates of STI among the 15 to 24 year-old age group;
- increased rates of HIV and STI occurring in men who have sex with men (MSM);

- increasing proportion of new HIV infections in individuals, particularly among women, emigrating from HIV endemic countries;
- a continued disproportionate burden of STBBI in Indigenous populations; and
- a continued disproportionate burden of blood borne infections in the injection drug use population.

Despite efforts, STBBI continue to have significant impact on Albertans and remain a public health challenge requiring intensive response. In April 2016, Alberta announced that rates of gonorrhea and infectious syphilis had reached outbreak levels, posing a risk to many sexually active Albertans. Gonorrhea and infectious syphilis rates in 2015 were double what they were in 2014. 2017 STI data indicate that gonorrhea and syphilis rates have continued to increase year over year.

In 2016, AHS, Alberta Health and community partners and stakeholders (representing diverse perspectives including clinical, prevention, research, harm reduction, HIV/AIDS, addictions, Indigenous, federal government, sexual and reproductive health) from across the province embarked on a process to develop a new STBBI strategy for Alberta.

Initial stakeholder engagements in summer 2016 included a review of the 2011-2016 Alberta Sexually Transmitted Infections and Blood Borne Pathogens Strategy and Action Plan to assess which elements remain relevant or require adaptation and to identify new approaches to address STBBI in Alberta. The core elements included in this Framework are a direct result of these initial stakeholder engagements.



Alberta Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections (STBBI) Strategic Framework 2018

GOAL

Enhanced health and wellness of all Albertans by preventing the incidence, reducing prevalence, minimizing the impact and diminishing the stigma of STBBI.

PRINCIPLES

This Framework is rooted in a public health approach that is concerned with preventing disease, promoting health and improving quality of life among the population as a whole. The Framework therefore incorporates the following principles and perspectives inherent to a public health approach:

- Partnership, integration and linkage with relevant programs, strategies and interventions;
- Determinants of health perspective and collaborative action involving many sectors of society;
- Integrated people-centred health system and community-level services;
- Community participation and meaningful involvement of people most affected by the issues; and
- A focus on equity.

Additional principles to guide Alberta's response to STBBI:

- **Harm Reduction Approach:** Harm reduction is a comprehensive, person-centred, just, and evidence-based approach. It aims to decrease adverse health, social and economic outcomes that may result from an individual's action. It does not require individuals to reduce or abstain from the potentially harmful actions. It represents policies/strategies, services, and practices, which aim to assist people to live safer and healthier lives. It acknowledges that each person is different and requires different supports, strategies, and goals. Harm Reduction enhances the ability of people involved in potentially harmful actions to have increased control over their lives and their health, and allows them to take protective and proactive measures for themselves, their families and their communities.
- **Evidence-informed and sustainable interventions:** Policies, programs, supports and services are informed by available evidence to achieve desired goals and deliver high quality results and are responsive to population needs and changing epidemiology. Resources are allocated in a way that meets today's needs, as well as anticipates and addresses future needs.
- **Shared responsibility:** Effective action on STBBI requires shared individual, community and governmental responsibility. Collective and coordinated action by diverse partners is required to improve both impact and efficiency and to collectively progress towards the goal of healthier Albertans.

KEY ACTION AREAS

Action is required across STBBI services:

- Prevention
- Early detection and diagnosis
- Treatment
- Support and care
- Raising awareness
- Addressing stigma

OBJECTIVES

- Reduce the rates of STBBI.
- Encourage Albertans to know their STBBI status.
- Increase accessibility and acceptability of STBBI testing and treatment.
- Promote healthy sexuality, including the freedom of sexual expression without fear, guilt or shame while using safer sexual practices.
- Increase Albertans' access to the full continuum of quality STBBI services and supports.
- Reduce the role of stigma as a barrier to Albertans' access to the full continuum of quality STBBI services and supports.
- Increase accessibility of harm reduction supplies and safer substance use practices to minimize harm.
- Enhance coordination between community supports and direct health care services, including timely information sharing.

OPERATIONALIZING THE FRAMEWORK

A primary purpose of this Framework is to provide AHS and community-level STBBI organizations with a policy foundation to guide the development of operational action plans and community-level interventions. The Framework provides high-level direction to the wide spectrum of STBBI interventions and services. To achieve measurable success, AHS (provincial and Zone-level), communities and agencies will augment components of the Framework (e.g., principles or objectives) to reflect local need and facilitate community input and ownership.

ROLES

Achievement of the goals and objectives outlined in this Framework will require commitment and collaboration across sectors.

Alberta Health commits to the following activities to support the achievement of the goals and objectives outlined in this Framework:

- Partner with AHS and community organizations to align policies and services/programs;
- Coordinate across ministries to facilitate multi-sectoral action where necessary;
- Collaborate with other jurisdictions and federal government partners where necessary;
- Provide evidenced-informed STBBI-related policies;
- Make STBBI data available on the Interactive Health Data Application;
- Establish processes and criteria for evaluating emerging pharmacological and biomedical prevention and treatment interventions; and
- Review and refresh provincial approaches to address STBBI, as required.

In its capacity as service delivery provider, AHS will continue to offer evidence-based health care services to Albertans. AHS will operationalize strategies and will provide expertise and support in collaborative work on the STBBI Operations Steering Committee.

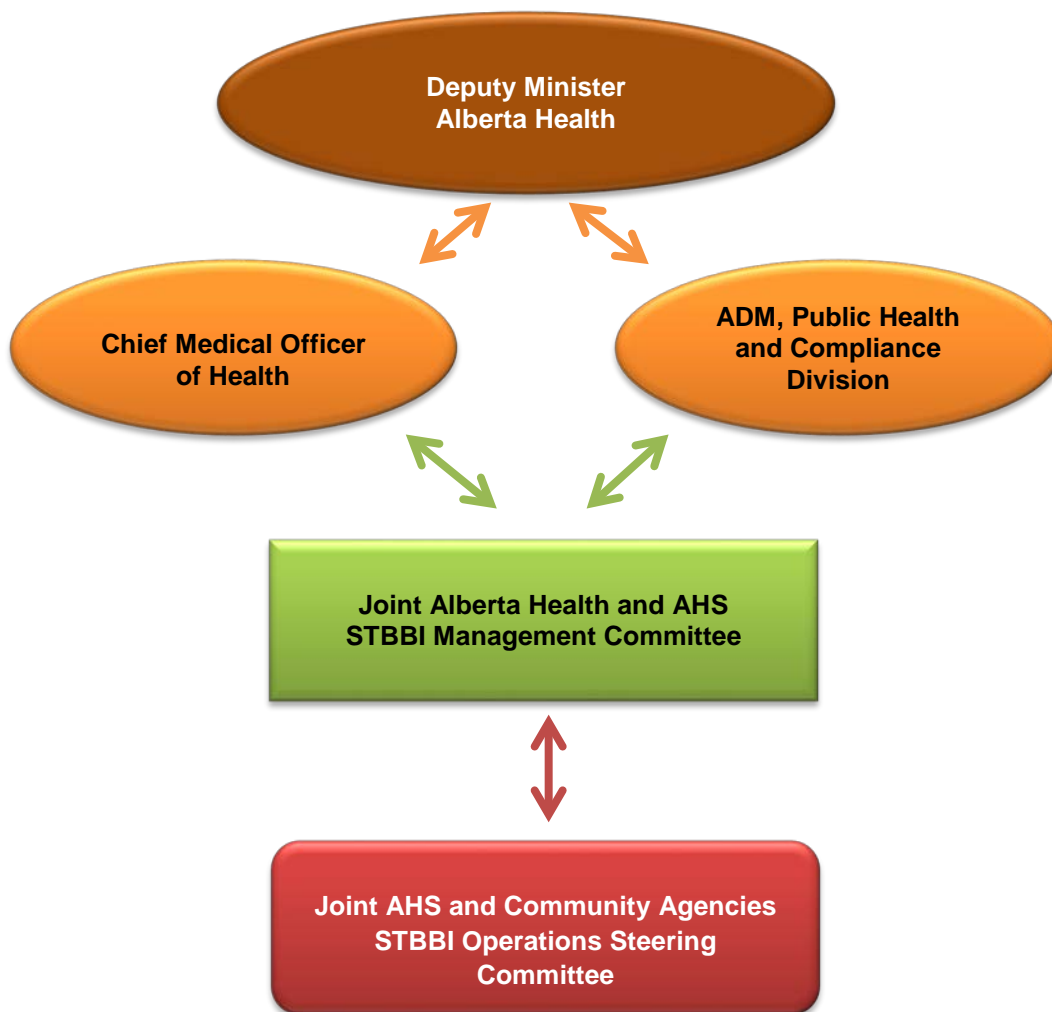
Community and nongovernmental organizations possess valuable knowledge and are key partners in the success of this Framework. They can contribute towards the success of the Framework by engaging in collective and coordinated action to improve both impact and efficiency of services and active participation in the Joint AHS and Community Agencies STBBI Operations Steering Committee.

OVERSIGHT

STBBI progress reporting, information sharing and updating on barriers and challenges will occur via the Joint Alberta Health and AHS STBBI Management Committee.

Rates of STBBI in Alberta will be reported publicly annually and are available online at the Government of [Alberta Interactive Health Data Application](#) webpage.

FIGURE: STBBI PROGRESS REPORTING GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE:



FRAMEWORK AT A GLANCE

Alberta Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBI) Strategic Framework 2017-2020

Goal:

Enhanced health and wellness of all Albertans by preventing, reducing the risk, minimizing the impact and diminishing the stigma of STBBI.

Key Action Areas	Guiding Principles	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention • Early Detection and Diagnosis • Treatment • Support and Care • Raising Awareness • Addressing Stigma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Health Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Partnership, integration and linkage with relevant programs, strategies and interventions; □ Determinants of health perspective and collaborative action involving many sectors of society; □ Integrated people-centred health system and community-level services; □ Community participation and meaningful involvement of people most affected by the issues; and □ A focus on equity. • Harm Reduction Approach • Evidence-Informed and Sustainable Interventions • Shared Responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the rates of STBBI • Encourage Albertans to know their STBBI status • Increase accessibility and acceptability of STBBI testing and treatment • Promote healthy sexuality, including the freedom of sexual expression without fear, guilt or shame while using safer sexual practices • Increase Albertans' access to the full continuum of quality STBBI services and supports • Reduce the role of stigma as a barrier to Albertans' access to the full continuum of quality STBBI services and supports. • Increase accessibility of harm reduction supplies and safer substance use practices to minimize harm • Enhance coordination between community supports and direct health care services, including timely information sharing

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