

March 12, 2021

Lorna Rosen
Deputy Minister
Alberta Health
22nd Floor, ATB Place
10025 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5J 1S6

Dear Madam:

**Subject: TDM, TCM, TMB, and DB - Public Fatality Inquiry
Response to Recommendations**

Please find enclosed a copy of the Honourable Judge J.E. Schaffter's three reports to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General for the deaths of the above-noted four young persons. This report will be publicly released on April 2, 2021.

The following recommendations made by Judge Schaffter may impact Alberta Health:

- The experts spoke at length about brain development research and research into the effects of trauma on children and the potential for long term negative impacts on the child in childhood and into adulthood. The greater the number of adverse childhood experiences the greater the potential negative impact. The Report, *Into Focus* by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate states that “trauma, abuse, family breakdown, parental substance use and lack of connection to school may increase a young person’s risk of substance use.” Early identification of childhood trauma and education of individuals, professional and familial of the effects of trauma on a child will assist in helping the child to develop resiliency in order to mitigate the effects of the trauma. Programs such as Head Start are geared towards providing young children who are experiencing difficulties with additional supports. Operation of these programs largely falls to not for profit community groups and in smaller rural areas such a group may not exist. **Government ministries should investigate and actively facilitate the operation of early intervention services in rural areas.**
- Although it appears from the representations of the panel members that education on a trauma informed approach for professionals has increased over the last 10 years, **Brain Development and training in the trauma informed approach should be maintained and enhanced.**

- At various times, the youths reviewed sought out help for their substance abuse and life circumstances. Sometimes the youth were met with barriers to communication existing between government ministries. The youth were seeking immediate assistance but were referred to other agencies with subsequent appointments. The youth did not follow through with the subsequent appointments which were set up for them. Professional supports for youth are frequently located outside the youth's community which often make them inaccessible. Youth Hubs and other wrap around services such as Graham's Place which was accessed by the youth D.B. have been identified as a means of providing an immediate, one-stop service integrating health, social services and supports. Research, in other countries and elsewhere in Canada, have shown these to be very effective. Although the creation of Youth Hubs was noted in the Government of Alberta's response to the *Into Focus* report by the Office of the Child and Youth advocate in 2018, few Hubs have been created. Again, this program requires an application by a community organization with some "seed money" from the government. Children Services are also not part of these Hubs. Smaller communities do not always have the resources to apply for such programming and further once operational, these programs rely on fundraising and community financial support. **Alberta Health should review the policy, funding and service delivery approaches that would facilitate the creation of more wrap around programs that are appropriately staffed with individuals knowledgeable about substance abuse, mental illness and the supports available for youth, particularly in rural communities. Services must be accessible and responsive.**

- Not all youth may be in a situation where they are ready to stop using substances. The youth reviewed at various times wanted to stop and other times wanted to continue with their drug use. There is growing recognition that harm-reduction strategies may be effective. Such strategies accept that adolescents may choose to use alcohol or drugs, and acknowledge that alcohol and drug abuse have potential health and psychosocial risks. Unlike abstinence-based approaches, which focus on eliminating the behaviour, harm-reduction strategies aim to reduce the dangers associated with substance use including safe injection sites, Naloxone/Narcan program which reduces harm to the youth until such time as they are willing and able to access other treatment. **Alberta Health should continue to implement and supplement harm reduction programs including:**
 - A) **Increasing education for youth, and general public in use of Naloxone/Narcan and distribution of such kits;**
 - B) **Creation of more safe consumption services and overdose prevention services sites particularly in rural communities;**
 - C) **Provision of counselling services following a medical intervention for overdose or substance use;**
 - D) **Opioid Agonist therapy programs for youth;**

E) Recognition that Youth perspectives in the development of harm reduction programming are needed to ensure that approaches are relatable and meaningful to young people, and effective for promoting the minimization of substance-related harms.

- The panel of experts noted that youth addiction treatment is an underserved area in Alberta. **It is noted that the Government has previously identified an investment of funding for this area. This investment should be continued.**
- All of the youth reviewed had been involved in the youth criminal justice system. Adult Drug Treatment Courts provide a pre-sentence alternative for addicted offenders that integrates justice, health services and treatment. These programs have shown a high degree of success and the Alberta Government has committed to the creation of additional Adult Drug Treatment Courts in the Province of Alberta. Drug Treatment Courts for youth could similarly provide assistance to youth experiencing substance use disorders that have brought them into contact with the youth criminal justice system by the provision of the wrap around services. **The Ministries of Justice and Health should inquire into the feasibility of the creation of Youth Drug Treatment Courts.**

I ask that you please advise the following:

- a) Whether Alberta Health accepts, accepts in principle, does not accept, or has a different response to the recommendation;
- b) A brief explanation of why that decision was made; and
- c) If Alberta Health intends to accept the recommendation, or to implement different measures, what steps will be taken in that regard.

A response to this enquiry is not mandatory. However, please be advised that any response received will be publicly released and posted on the Open Government Portal:

<https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/responses-to-public-fatality-inquiry-recommendations>.

If a response has not been received by August 3, 2021 (four months from the public release date) that information will also be made publicly available.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours truly,

Original Signed

Abid Mavani
Fatality Inquiry Coordinator

Enclosures