



TITLE

HARM REDUCTION FOR PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCE USE

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HCS-33

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Alberta Health Services Executive Team

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Addiction and Mental Health
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N/A

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Health Care and Services

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October 28, 2016

If you have any questions or comments regarding the information in this policy, please contact the Clinical Policy Department at clinicalpolicy@albertahealthservices.ca. The Clinical Policy website is the official source of current approved clinical policies, procedures and directives.

PURPOSE

- Alberta Health Services is committed to **harm reduction** as one approach when working with individuals that use **psychoactive substances**.
- To offer direction in program planning and service delivery within the organization built on the principles and evidence base for the practice of harm reduction.
- To encourage and facilitate joint harm reduction strategies and partnership initiatives between Alberta Health Services and community agencies.

POLICY STATEMENT

- Alberta Health Services recognizes the value of harm reduction as an important component in the continuum of care required to effectively serve individuals that use psychoactive substances.
- Alberta Health Services may directly, or in partnership with community agencies, provide a range of harm reduction programs and services that assist individuals, families and communities to reduce the risk and adverse consequences of psychoactive substance use.

APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this policy is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary). This policy does not limit any legal rights to which you may otherwise be entitled.

POLICY ELEMENTS

1. Continuum of Care

- 1.1 Alberta Health Services may ensure the availability of a comprehensive continuum of services for persons who use psychoactive substances, including health promotion, illness prevention, harm reduction, early identification, clinical care and treatment, long-term rehabilitation and support. These services are not mutually exclusive and, taken together, form an integrated, evidence-informed system of care.
- 1.2 Harm reduction programs and services will be provided directly by Alberta Health Services Harm Reduction Teams, other Alberta Health Services programs, or through supporting partner organizations, as most appropriate.
- 1.3 Alberta Health Services will deliver quality prevention and health promotion programs that enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors for psychoactive substance use.
- 1.4 Strategies for harm reduction are applicable across the spectrum of health care delivery.

2. Evidence-based and Quality Assurance

- 2.1 Harm reduction initiatives will be based on sound research and evidence relating to individual and population health outcomes and cost effectiveness.
- 2.2 Harm reduction initiatives will be supported by systematic monitoring, evaluation and knowledge translation to improve service delivery.

3. Information and Education

- 3.1 Alberta Health Services will provide current and accurate information about harm reduction principles and practices to increase awareness of health care providers, individuals and their families, and the public.
- 3.2 Alberta Health Services will ensure information and communication about harm reduction is accessible, respectful, relevant and engaging to the needs of diverse target groups.
- 3.3 Experts familiar with harm reduction (such providers working in Addiction and Mental Health, and Public Health) will provide opportunities for training and professional development, for staff and community service providers, to increase knowledge and skill in the practice of harm reduction approaches.

4. Client Services and Supports

- 4.1 Alberta Health Services may provide access to non-judgmental harm reduction services and supports needed to improve the health of individuals that use psychoactive substances.
- 4.2 Alberta Health Services will deliver and support outreach programs and services that are available and accessible at multiple sites and offered at convenient times.

5. Collaboration

- 5.1 Alberta Health Services will seek practical solutions to reduce harm from psychoactive substance use by working with individuals, families and communities, to address key determinants of health, such as socio-economic status, early childhood development, housing and safety.

DEFINITIONS

Harm reduction means those policies, programs and practices that aim primarily to reduce the adverse health, social or economic consequences of the use of legal and illegal psychoactive substances without necessarily reducing consumption. Initiatives include but are not limited to outreach and needle exchange programs, supervised injection sites, safer inhalation kits, drug substitution therapies (such as methadone maintenance), health and drug education, and safe housing options. A harm reduction approach to substance use accepts that abstinence may not be a realistic goal for some people.

Psychoactive substance means a substance that, when ingested affects mental processes (e.g., cognition or affect). This term and its equivalent, psychotropic drug, are the most neutral and descriptive terms for the whole class of substances, licit and illicit (including controlled drugs like alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs). The term does not necessarily imply abuse or dependence.

REVISIONS

N/A