

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 09/08/21

New Opioid Poisoning Committee

Edmonton, AB: A new Opioid Poisoning Committee has been formed by the Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association in response to the accelerated number of overdose deaths in our community. In 2020 alone, 1,154 Albertans died of opioid poisoning. Opioids are as equal of a public health crisis as COVID-19, given that 1,211 Albertans died of COVID-19 in 2020. However, there is a clear lack of leadership and support from the Alberta government. This is an emergency that cannot continue to be ignored. Our committee will advocate for the needs of our patients and community.

Committee Members

Co-Chairs Dr. Ginetta Salvalaggio and Dr. Cheryl Mack will lead the Committee. The Committee brings together urban, rural, and Indigenous physician representatives across several medical disciplines with first-hand knowledge of this public health emergency--public health, intensive care, emergency medicine, family medicine, addiction medicine, pediatrics, and infectious diseases--to provide the comprehensive expertise needed to respond to this crisis.

Purpose and Mandate

The number of Albertans dying of overdose is increasing year over year. An average of FOUR Albertans are dying every day from overdose in 2021. Incomprehensibly, existing harm reduction services are being cut. There is no question that addiction treatment options should be available to anyone who requests them, but they are not a replacement for immediate life-saving measures, which should also be available to anyone, anytime, and without caveats. As the situation in Alberta becomes graver, there is need for physician leadership, which is not influenced by politics or stigma. The Committee will advocate for evidence-based public information, government policy and health system services that support our community's health and well-being to reduce the number of adverse outcomes for people who use drugs.

The Committee will fulfil the following responsibilities for an opioid crisis response on behalf of the Edmonton zone medical community:

1. Advocate for access to evidence-informed services for people who use drugs.
2. Recommend short- and long-term strategies to the public and government designed to reduce the number of opioid poisoning deaths in Alberta.
3. Be a trusted source of medical advice on a public health approach to substance use.
4. Raise public awareness of the impact of opioid poisoning on patients and the health system