

EXCLUSIVE: Alberta to open 105-bed youth addictions facility in Edmonton

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The Edmonton Young Offender Centre will be the home of the Northern Alberta Recovery Centre and will feature 105 new youth addictions treatment beds. Photo by Ian Kucerak /Postmedia

EDMONTON — Alberta will spend \$23 million to renovate a section of Edmonton’s jail for young offenders to create an addictions treatment facility, more than doubling the province’s capacity to treat youth with addictions.

Article content

The Alberta government is expected to make the announcement Tuesday.

The facility will be called the Northern Alberta Youth Recovery Centre and will be housed in half of what is currently the Edmonton Young Offenders Centre. The separated facility will create 105 new youth addictions treatment beds. At present, there are 70 beds for youth with addictions in Alberta, and the addition of the new beds — expected to come online in 2026 — will bring the total to 175.

“Addiction ends in one of two ways. It either ends in pain, misery and tragically, given enough time, death or — and this is the only option — it ends in treatment, recovery and a second lease on life,” said Dan Williams, Alberta’s mental health and addictions minister, in an interview.

“We believe that our children, who are vulnerable, who are in addiction, often through no choice of their own, but because of intergenerational trauma, we believe that they deserve an opportunity in recovery, that if our province gives up on them, if society gives up on them, who’s left?”

The renovated facility will be separate from the rest of the youth corrections centre, with no shared living spaces. It’s part of Alberta’s larger focus on recovery. Rather than focusing on harm reduction — offering a safer supply of opioids compared to street drugs, for example — Alberta has placed its bets on getting people into treatment and recovery.

“Canada, for the last 25 years, has been led down this garden path, told by activists and the media and academics that we need to falsely make a choice between caring for those in addiction or having safe communities. And that’s a lie,” said Williams.

Though highly controversial in addictions circles, the Alberta model may, according to the government, be showing some signs of success. Alberta’s rate of opioid deaths are lower than they have been at any point since 2019, according to [government statistics](#), amounting to a 42-per-cent drop in fatal opioid overdoses between 2023 and 2024.

“I don’t want to start to intervene only when we see youth overdosing and dying. I want to start intervening when we see youth in addiction,” said Williams.

While youth will be able to voluntarily access treatment at the Northern Alberta Recovery Centre, there already exists in Alberta a legal mechanism to force minors into treatment. Alberta’s United Conservative government is expected to [introduce legislation](#) next year that would create the legal framework for courts, police or families to push their loved ones into mandatory addictions treatment.

For minors, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act has, since 2006, allowed legal guardians to seek court orders to get minors into treatment, where they can be held for counselling, detox and stabilization for up to 15 days.

“Alberta not only believes in that for children. We also believe that if somebody is a danger to themselves or others because of their drug use, because of the addiction,” said Williams. “We need to have an intervention regime that works and compassion prevention is going to apply to adults and youth.”

It's unclear just how many youth in Alberta struggle with addiction, but Williams said it's "increasingly a worse and worse crisis in our society," especially during the COVID-19 pandemic as social networks and community safety nets broke down.

"They were eviscerated," said Williams.

Alberta, over the past several years, has poured money into its addictions system. It has promised 11 new treatment facilities around the province. Three are already in operation: One in Red Deer, one in Lethbridge, and one in Gunn, a hamlet northwest of Edmonton near Lac Ste. Anne.

Williams said that Alberta's addictions system is drawing addictions professionals from around the country and there are training programs available for "recovery coaches," often those who have survived substance abuse, who now help others seeking recovery.

"Alberta is offering, for the first time in 25 years, a policy setting where people get healthy because of public-health addiction policy. You have no idea how attractive that is to Canadians who work in the space countrywide," Williams said.

This week also marks National Addictions Awareness Week.

"We need to be honest that we do not want to stigmatize the drug user, but we need to stigmatize that drug use is devastating, that addiction will ruin your life and often end it, gone unchecked," said Williams.