



Province opens third addictions recovery centre northwest of Edmonton

By Chelan Skulski and Craig Ellingson | August 15, 2024 at 7:27PM EDT

Alberta's premier opened the province's third of 11 promised recovery communities on Thursday northwest of Edmonton. The 75-bed facility in the hamlet of Gunn, which is located on the northeast shore of Lac Ste. Anne, 95 kilometres northwest of Edmonton, started welcoming clients late last month, giving more Alberta men fighting addiction a chance at recovery.

"We're giving people the opportunity to turn their lives around because that is true compassion," Premier Danielle Smith said Thursday at the Lakeview Recovery Community, which was formed following a \$21-million renovation to the former McCullough Centre.

"Leaving them to suffer is unacceptable and cruel."

Last year, more Albertans died from drug poisoning than any year on record. In the first 11 months of 2023, there were 1,841 drug poisoning deaths, 1,706 of which were connected to opioid use, according to the provincial substance use surveillance system. Drug poisoning deaths in Alberta have more than doubled since 2019.

The province opened the first two recovery communities last year in Red Deer and in Lethbridge. The 11 planned centres are the UCP government's core solution to the province's addictions crisis.

Patients are able to stay at the centre free of charge for up to one year. When asked how effective the model has proven, Dan Williams, Alberta's mental health and addictions minister, says the province needs more time to collect data.

"What we see when we look at reports from other programs studying their success, if they don't look at data beyond one or two weeks afterwards -- which is often the case with some of these reports -- it's not very helpful," Williams said.

"You need to look at it after six months, one year. We really want to see people stay in sobriety for at least two years. The data internationally shows that when you have 24 months of sobriety, you have a very, very high chance of long-term ... recovery."

Smith said the province recognizes "that demand is enormous" and that it has several ways "to manage it in the meantime." Alberta is seeing a recent drop in opioid-related deaths.

In April last year, 186 Albertans died from opioids. This April, that number dropped by 51 per cent. The province says in the first four months of 2024, there were 27 per cent fewer such deaths from the year before.

Dr. Tara Moriarty, a mortality researcher at the University of Toronto, says it's too soon to credit recovery communities for declining deaths, however, adding the province could learn from British Columbia in providing more transparent drug data.

"It's certainly way too early to take a victory lap, because based on what we're seeing from excess mortality, it does not look like the problem has gone away in Alberta," Moriarty told CTV News Edmonton on Thursday.