

Supporting regulation of addiction services – February 25, 2025



Minister of Mental Health and addiction, Dan Williams, February 25, 2025

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Alberta's government is proudly building the Alberta Recovery Model, a continuum of mental health and addiction care that includes prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery. The model is based on the fact that recovery is possible, and Albertans deserve the best care to support them on their path of recovery.

The *Mental Health Services Protection Act* provides a foundation to ensure safe, quality mental health and addiction care, and the authority to establish licensing programs for mental health and addiction services. Services for bed-based addiction treatment, narcotic transition, drug consumption and psychedelic drug treatment are currently licensed under the act.

Alberta's government is proposing amendments to be more flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of Albertans. The proposed amendments position the act as a framework legislation to provide better oversight for mental health and addiction services and help ensure Albertans receive quality, standardized treatment and services.

If passed, the amendments would come into effect in fall 2025.

"We are committed to developing a recovery-oriented system of care that grows and evolves to meet the needs of every Albertan. These proposed amendments reflect our dedication to maintaining a system that is both effective and adaptable."

Dan Williams, Minister of Mental Health and Addiction

Enhancing bed-based addiction treatment services

Currently, all bed-based addiction treatment services are subject to the same licensing requirements, regardless of the type or intensity of services provided. The proposed amendments would create three types of bed-based addiction treatment services subject to separate licensing requirements:

- Withdrawal management services: medically supervised services to manage or support an individual through the process of withdrawal from one or more substances;
- Intensive treatment services: intensive and structured residential care services for individuals with addiction; and
- Non-intensive recovery services: services in a recovery-oriented environment that provide less-intensive treatment compared to intensive treatment services.

In addition, proposed amendments would add a provision for title protection. This would mean only licensed bed-based addiction treatment services providers would be able to use these service descriptions.

The goal of these changes is to better support Albertans to find services, get the right support and know what to expect when accessing each type of service. Matching individuals with the appropriate level of care promotes better health outcomes and maximizes the effectiveness of resources. Service providers would also benefit from increased licensing clarity.

Introducing exemptions

Another proposed amendment includes authorizing the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction to exempt specific people or service providers on a unique case-by-case basis from the act's framework.

Exemptions would only be allowed in very specific instances, such as for medical reasons, scientific research, or when there's a clear public benefit. Clear guidelines would be developed to ensure exemptions would only be granted in appropriate circumstances.

The ability for the minister to grant exemptions would allow for flexibility and adaptability in rare circumstances or complex situations.

Refining regulatory requirements

The proposed legislation also includes administrative amendments to address regulatory inconsistencies, clarify requirements, and better align the act with the Alberta Recovery Model. As an example, references to residential addiction treatment services would be updated to bed-based treatment services.

Alberta's government is making record investments and removing barriers to recovery-oriented supports for all Albertans, regardless of where they live or their financial situation. Actions include adding more than 10,000 new publicly funded addiction treatment spaces; eliminating daily user fees for bed-based treatment services; and expanding access to the Virtual Opioid Dependency Program, which provides same-day access to life-saving treatment medication.

Quick facts

- Albertans can call 211 Alberta to find supports and services in their area.
- Albertans struggling with opioid addiction can contact the Virtual Opioid Dependency Program (VODP) by calling 1-844-383-7688, seven days a week, from 6 a.m. to midnight. The VODP provides same-day access to addiction medicine specialists. There is no wait list.