

Opinion:

New Alberta centre will find best practices for mental health, addictions

[Kym Kaufmann](#) - Published Nov 05, 2024



Kym Kaufmann, incoming CEO of Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence speaks as the Government of Alberta announced a new organization that will support the development of the mental health and addiction system of care during a news conference in Calgary on Tuesday, April 2, 2024. Jim Wells/Postmedia Photo by Jim Wells /Postmedia

Every person suffering from mental health or addiction challenges deserves the opportunity to recover. No one wants to watch their parent, child, sibling or loved one struggle alone and afraid without a path to freedom from the grip of a treatable illness.

Addiction and mental health challenges affect millions of lives in ways that extend far beyond the individual. Families, communities, and workplaces feel its persistent ripple effects. While various programs aim to address these pervasive challenges, we can and will do more to give anyone suffering their best chance of success.

The innovative Alberta Recovery Model was created to turn despair into hope, by building a system where every Albertan has the opportunity to pursue recovery and live a healthy and productive life. The Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence (CORE), established in June 2024, builds on this innovative work by evaluating the programs that support individuals and families in their pursuit of recovery through a holistic, integrated, recovery-oriented system of care. This system includes prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery support, acknowledging that response efforts are broader than the health system alone.

With a scientific research team of eight and growing, CORE is already hard at work on its mandate. Some of our initial work includes a comprehensive survey looking at how many people in Alberta are dealing with addiction and mental health concerns, how many Albertans are in recovery, how they got there, and what formal and informal services and supports were useful to them along the way. People hoping for recovery need to know that recovery is real, sustainable, and can be achieved through multiple pathways.

We will also advance guidance on recovery-friendly workplaces, knowing that most people with addiction or mental health challenges continue to work and will benefit from early interventions and long-term support. We will work continuously to foster an understanding of recovery within families, communities and underserved populations, and continue to develop recovery-oriented systems of care. These systems will optimize high-quality and adaptable service delivery, ensuring people receive the help they need when they need it.

A particularly unique aspect of CORE's work is its emphasis on data-driven outcomes rooted in robust scientific evaluation of the programs within the Alberta Recovery Model. The organization collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders — from clinicians and researchers to policymakers and recovery advocates — to ensure that the most effective interventions are being implemented and evaluated. Addiction treatment, like any health-care service, should be grounded in rigorous scientific evidence, and CORE pushes for innovation in care delivery, outcome tracking, and program evaluation.

It's not good enough to provide services in a certain way simply because that's always how it's been done. Addiction and mental health services must innovate, track outcomes and evaluate programs to ensure those who need help get the best care possible.

In addition to the evaluation of existing programs and services, CORE will research best practices for recovery from around the world, analyze data meticulously, and make objective and reliable recommendations for policy and practice. Bridging the gap between research and real-world application will ensure strategies and recommendations are realistic, informed, and impactful.

It's important to understand recovery is not the same thing as treatment. Too often we think about treatment as the goal, but the reality is recovery is much more. For example, confronting an addiction may mean taking a medication, speaking with a therapist, seeking withdrawal management or bed-based treatment. While these can be incredibly important steps, long-term recovery is much more holistic, requiring ongoing support and a commitment to address the causes and consequences of substance use and unmanaged mental health challenges to create a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Similarly, recovery from mental health challenges is a process through which a person develops tools and strategies to live a full and satisfying life despite mental health symptoms or disorders remaining.

CORE's vision and mission is to find the most effective ways to support recovery by empowering decisionmakers with data and evidence to empower people on their journey to wellness. Successful programs measure outcomes because it is imperative people know what works and what does not work as they take sustained action toward a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life.

I have spent my entire professional life working in the mental health and addiction sector because I believe recovery is attainable and sustainable. Through the establishment of a robust and practical system of care, together we can prove that recovery is possible.

Kym Kaufmann is CEO of the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence (CORE).