

Call to Maintain Funding for Alberta's Injectable Opioid Agonist Treatment Clinics

An open letter to the Government of Alberta

Honourable Jason Kenney, Premier

Cc: Honourable Tyler Shandro, Minister of Health, Alberta

Honourable Jason Luan, Associate Minister for Mental Health and Addictions

David Shepherd, MLA, Opposition Critic for Health

Heather Sweet, MLA, Opposition Critic for Mental Health and Addictions

Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health

Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health, Canada

Dear Premier Kenney,

We, the undersigned are a group of Albertan patients, families, physicians, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, counsellors, peer workers, academics, and concerned citizens of the province. We are writing to express our grave concerns with your government's decision to discontinue funding for Edmonton and Calgary's injectable opioid agonist treatment (iOAT) programs after March 2021. Many of us have experience providing iOAT. Some of us and our families have directly benefited from receiving this life-saving treatment. All of us understand the need for iOAT as part of the full spectrum of care for people as they recover from the impacts of opioid use disorders and have been encouraged by the remarkable health and social benefits of this treatment to the people who receive it, to their families, and to the community at large.

While much of the health care system's attention has turned towards protecting Albertans through the global COVID-19 pandemic, we also recognize that people at risk of severe adverse outcomes from substance use disorders are at the intersection of both the pandemic and the opioid overdose crisis which continues to exact its toll on communities across Canada. Alberta remains one of the hardest hit provinces with close to two people dying daily as a result of accidental opioid poisoning¹ and reports of increasing EMS calls for overdose² and the re-emergence of carfentanil in the drug supply³ make us concerned that this crisis has worsened over recent months. At this time more than any before, we must offer all evidence-based treatments to patients. The decision to discontinue funding to iOAT makes this option inaccessible for Albertans who may seek help as the programs are no longer able to accept new patients. Those who are currently benefitting from this treatment will be forced off of it in the coming months and many of these individuals may suffer severe adverse outcomes as a result.

In September 2019, the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM) published National Guidelines on iOAT for Opioid Use Disorder. National experts thoroughly reviewed scientific evidence to develop these guidelines which were subject to expert peer review. The guidelines are clear: iOAT is a necessary treatment option for individuals with severe injection opioid use disorders that have not responded to other treatments⁴. Benefits demonstrated through scientific study include reduced illicit opioid use, improved retention in treatment and health care, reduced criminal involvement and incarceration, reduced mortality, and improved overall health and social functioning⁵⁻⁸. Furthermore, studies in both Europe and Canada have consistently proven that iOAT is cost effective given the significant reductions in criminal activity⁹⁻¹¹ and hospitalizations¹² with their associated costs.

The National Guideline on iOAT for Opioid Use Disorder is also clear that iOAT should not be discontinued while a patient continues to benefit from treatment. Decisions to transition to other treatment options should only be made in collaboration with the patient and based on thorough risk-benefit assessments. Discontinuing funding for the programs removes that opportunity and forces their health care providers to practice against national expert guidance. Patients who have developed trusting relationships with these programs will be disengaged once again and many may not avail themselves of other treatments that have failed them before. These prospects are tragic as patients will be at tremendous risk of destabilization and related harms, including overdose mortality.

The iOAT programs in Edmonton and Calgary are benchmarks of what an intensive, multidisciplinary, and comprehensive addiction treatment program can offer for individuals at critical periods in the trajectory of their recovery. Their patients have access to not only life-saving medication treatment from physicians and nurse practitioners but are also supported in their recovery by peer workers, mental health resources, social workers, nurses, pharmacists, and primary care. Albertans can be proud of what these clinics have accomplished and the positive impacts on their communities. With ongoing support and funding, they could no doubt continue to thrive, support recovery, and offer hope to highly vulnerable patients.

Premier, please do not end this evidence-based, cost effective treatment in Alberta. We call on the Government of Alberta to reverse its decision to discontinue funding to the Edmonton and Calgary Injectable Opioid Agonist Treatment Clinics and to continue to support this critical treatment option for Albertans.

Sincerely,

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Ilhan Ali	<i>Edmonton</i>	Ily Barnes	<i>Edmonton</i>
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Susan Bornemisza	<i>Calgary</i>	Hannah Cooke	<i>Edmonton</i>
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Rene Pierno	<i>Calgary</i>	LaVonne Rideout	<i>Lethbridge</i>
Dean Pierno	<i>Calgary</i>	Kayla Riske	<i>Edmonton</i>
Edward Pierno	<i>Calgary</i>	Carly Rivard	<i>Edmonton</i>
Brittany Piper	<i>Edmonton</i>	Susan Robblee	<i>Sherwood Park</i>
Linda Pires	<i>Edmonton</i>	Ashley Robertson	<i>Calgary</i>
Wanda Plain Eagle	<i>Pikani First Nations, Brocket</i>	Adrian Robinson	<i>Edmonton</i>
Ralph Playdon	<i>Parkland County</i>	Brandee Rombough	<i>Fort Saskatchewan</i>
Mark Poon	<i>Edmonton</i>	Andi Rombs	<i>Edmonton</i>
Elisa Poon	<i>Edmonton</i>	Alexis Roy	<i>Edmonton</i>

Presley Ruller	<i>Edmonton</i>	Shanyn Straughan	<i>Edmonton</i>
Paige Russell	<i>Edmonton</i>	Nicole Streeper	<i>Lacombe</i>
Daniel Ryan	<i>Edmonton</i>	Tyrone Suazo	<i>Edmonton</i>
Heidi Ryll	<i>Edmonton</i>	Nureen Sumar	<i>Calgary</i>
Essi Salokangas	<i>Edmonton</i>	Melissa Swabb	<i>Edmonton</i>
Emilia Salokangas	<i>Edmonton</i>	Danielle Tabler	<i>Edmonton</i>
Kelsey Salpeter	<i>Edmonton</i>	Torri Tallas	<i>Sherwood Park</i>
Ginetta Salvalaggio	<i>Edmonton</i>	Danielle Tasse	<i>Sherwood Park</i>
Shelley Sauvegeau	<i>Stony Plain</i>	Robert Tatti	<i>Edmonton</i>
Tyla Savard	<i>Grande Prairie</i>	Erica Taylor	<i>Sherwood Park</i>
Corinne Sawarin	<i>Edmonton</i>	Lisa Taylor	<i>Edmonton</i>
Talihha Sayer	<i>Edmonton</i>	Andrea Taylor	<i>Edmonton</i>
Linda Schaeffer	<i>Calgary</i>	Kayla Teichroeb	<i>Lethbridge</i>
Lois Scheerschmidt	<i>Sherwood Park</i>	Kristiana Ternes	<i>Edmonton</i>
Kristen Schmidt	<i>Edmonton</i>	Kerrin Theoret	<i>Edmonton</i>
Petra Schulz	<i>Edmonton</i>	Cassandra Thew	<i>Edmonton</i>
Richard Schulz	<i>Edmonton</i>	Jenny Thibault	<i>Edmonton</i>
Julian Schulz	<i>Edmonton</i>	Charlene Thiessen	<i>Calgary</i>
Tally Scott	<i>Edmonton</i>	Candace Thomas	<i>Edmonton</i>
Emma Scott	<i>Taber</i>	Stephanie Thomas	<i>Edmonton</i>
Mark Scott	<i>Calgary</i>	Lorna Thomas	<i>Edmonton</i>
Amy Semaka	<i>St Albert</i>	Tracy Thompson	<i>Claresholm</i>
Katherine Senio	<i>Edmonton</i>	Maria Thompson	<i>Edmonton</i>
Elizabeth Sentner	<i>Calgary</i>	Shauna Thurston	<i>Edmonton</i>
Sydney Shannon	<i>Edmonton</i>	Zach Tilden	<i>St Albert</i>
Tiffany Shorten	<i>Edmonton</i>	Andre Tinio	<i>Edmonton</i>
Alec Skillings	<i>Edmonton</i>	Terry Tobin	<i>Edmonton</i>
Dylan Sloan	<i>Edmonton</i>	Norbert Topolski	<i>Edmonton</i>
Abby Sly	<i>Edmonton</i>	Allan Tourangeau	<i>Edmonton</i>
Doug Smiley	<i>Calgary</i>	Alexandra Townsend	<i>Edmonton</i>
Brittany Smith	<i>Edmonton</i>	Rhonda Tremblay	<i>Edmonton</i>
Sarah Smyth	<i>Edmonton</i>	Michael Trew	<i>Calgary</i>
Kelsey Speed	<i>Edmonton</i>	Karen Turner	<i>Edmonton</i>
Terri-Lee Spence	<i>Edmonton</i>	Shanell Twan	<i>Edmonton</i>
Angela Staines	<i>Edmonton</i>	Les Umperville	<i>Edmonton</i>
Katherine Stasiuk	<i>Calgary</i>	Kari Ursulescu	<i>Medicine Hat</i>
Roberta Stasyk	<i>Fort Saskatchewan</i>	Jelle Van Ens	<i>Beaver County</i>
Teira Stauth	<i>Edmonton</i>	Shay J. Vanderschaeghe	<i>Red Deer</i>
Jaye-Lynn Stebner	<i>Edmonton</i>	Tianna Vandervoort	<i>Edmonton</i>
Sarah Stelfox	<i>Edmonton</i>	Cam Vandervoort	<i>Edmonton</i>
Katrina Stephenson	<i>Edmonton</i>	Samuel Vasser	<i>Edmonton</i>
Linda Stollings	<i>Edmonton</i>	Tammy Vaughan	<i>Calgary</i>
Joshua Storie	<i>Edmonton</i>	Cindy Verhaeghe	<i>Edmonton</i>
Tim Strain	<i>Calgary</i>	Stephen Vincent	<i>Calgary</i>
Lindsay Straiton	<i>Edmonton</i>	Evelyn Violini	<i>Turner Valley</i>

Hakique Virani	<i>Edmonton</i>	Sydney Wild	<i>Edmonton</i>
Kirsten Visser	<i>Edmonton</i>	Kim Wilkinson	<i>Edmonton</i>
Elaine Vranas	<i>Edmonton</i>	Daniel Wilneff	<i>Edmonton</i>
Lori Vrebosch	<i>Pikani First Nations, Brocket</i>	Emma Wilson	<i>St Albert</i>
Jordan Vrebosch	<i>Pikani First Nations, Brocket</i>	Patty Wilson	<i>Calgary</i>
Trisha Vyse	<i>Edmonton</i>	Mackenzie Winder	<i>Tofield</i>
Adam Walls	<i>Edmonton</i>	Dustin Winslow	<i>Edmonton</i>
Li Wang	<i>Calgary</i>	Cassandra Woit	<i>Edmonton</i>
Calum Ward	<i>Edmonton</i>	Dale Woloshen	<i>Medicine Hat</i>
Dawn Warden	<i>Airdrie</i>	Deneen Woods	<i>Edmonton</i>
Jayelle Warken	<i>Edmonton</i>	Kelvin Wright	<i>Edmonton</i>
Joanna Wasaznik	<i>Edmonton</i>	Ian Wu	<i>Edmonton</i>
Deborah Watson	<i>Red Deer</i>	Tina Yarmey	<i>Edmonton</i>
Rhonda Watt	<i>Wetaskiwin</i>	Kathie Yeung	<i>Edmonton</i>
Arianna Watts	<i>Edmonton</i>	Colter Yeung	<i>Edmonton</i>
Joshua Watts	<i>Sherwood Park</i>	Shelby Young	<i>Edmonton</i>
Kylie Weatherall	<i>Edmonton</i>	Rayanna Yu	<i>Edmonton</i>
Savannah Weber	<i>St Albert</i>	Klaudia Zabrzenski	<i>Calgary</i>
Eva T. Weinlick	<i>Edmonton</i>	Laly Zamudio	<i>Lethbridge</i>
Angela Welz	<i>Edmonton</i>	Norbert Zatonski	<i>Edmonton</i>
Cydney West	<i>Edmonton</i>	Dana Zawortny	<i>Edmonton</i>
Megan Westgarth	<i>Medicine Hat</i>	Lyndsey Zepp	<i>Edmonton</i>
Jodi White-Millan	<i>Edmonton</i>	Dan Zimmerman	<i>Edmonton</i>
Steven Whytock	<i>Edmonton</i>	Lee Zorniak	<i>Edmonton</i>
Alan Wigmore	<i>Spruce Grove</i>		
Valdine Wilbur	<i>Parkland County</i>		

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