



Albertans for Ethical Drug Policy - Joint Statement, August 31, 2021

Re: International Overdose Awareness Day

[International Overdose Awareness Day \(IOAD\)](#) is a global event on August 31st.

It is a day to remember, but also a day to act. In light of drug poisoning death rates we have never seen before in this province, Albertans for Ethical Drug Policy feel compelled to focus on action to confront a government that does not listen to or care about people most affected by this drug poisoning crisis.

Between January and May of this year, 624 Albertans died from accidental drug poisonings — a 41 percent increase compared to the same time frame last year, which was the worst year on record. This means that every day four people die and four families are left grieving. The response of the UCP Government contributes to the death toll rather than preventing further deaths.

Today, on International Overdose Awareness Day, the coalition Albertans for Ethical Drug Policy submit the following joint statement¹:

Since the United Conservative Party (UCP) took power in 2019, they have waged an intentional and systematic attack on harm reduction in the province while Alberta has entered the worst phase of its overdose crisis. In 2020, the increasingly volatile and deadly drug supply claimed the lives of [1,328 Albertans](#) – a 155% increase from 521 in 2019, yet worldwide, there has never been an overdose fatality at a supervised consumption site.

The list of acts of structural violence against people who use drugs by the Alberta Government is lengthy and reprehensible:

1. Freezing funding for a fixed supervised consumption service (SCS) in Medicine Hat and a mobile site in Calgary in 2019.
2. Commissioning and endorsement of their infamous [SCS review report](#), designed to manufacture support for future closures. Despite the report being [refuted by scientists and public health experts across Canada](#) as methodologically invalid, it is still being utilized to rationalize the dismantling of harm reduction in Alberta.
3. In August of 2020, the UCP closed [North America's busiest SCS](#) over alleged financial misappropriation. This 'anonymous tip' was confirmed to be unfounded, but the site remains closed while the neighbouring Kainai Nation battles a drug poisoning crisis that claimed [91 lives](#), or 0.7% of their population, from April 2020 to March 2021.
4. [Closure of a treatment centre](#) for homeless men in February of 2021.
5. Threatening the lives of patients at injectable opioid agonist treatment (iOAT) programs in Edmonton and Calgary, by planning to close these programs, a decision that was

¹ Updated from our earlier statement in June 2021

reversed by [legal action](#). Still capacity at the programs is reduced as the decision only applies to new clients.

6. [Rewriting of the provincial harm reduction policy](#), reported in March 2021, that severely weakens the policy framework.
7. [Moving the Addiction Recovery detox facility](#) from downtown Edmonton to Alberta Hospital outside the City of Edmonton, where it is hard for people to reach, especially those without family or transportation or family support, thereby putting lives of people who are not able to access this service any longer at risk.
8. Delaying access to overdose prevention apps and hotlines with the creation of a made-in-Alberta service rather than making operational solutions immediately available ([NORS](#) hotline, [Be Brave](#) and [Lifeguard](#) apps).
9. On April 30, 2021, it was announced that the SCS at Edmonton's Boyle Street Community Services (BSCS) would [permanently close](#). Three weeks later, [three bodies](#) were found near the former BSCS site. Over a 48 hour timespan, emergency services responded to [55 overdoses in the Edmonton Zone](#).
10. The SCS in Calgary's Sheldon Chumir Urgent Care Centre is being [closed down](#) to protect undisclosed business interests, while more than [50 Calgary businesses](#) declare explicit support for the site and associated harm reduction services.
11. [Rejecting the provision of pharmaceutical alternatives to toxic street drugs](#) to prevent drug poisoning death and to help people stabilize.
12. The implementation of new guidelines for consumption services, due to come into effect in September, vastly exceed federal guidelines and will impose additional barriers to accessing supervised consumption services, with the risk of many using alone instead. This has already prompted members of our alliance to launch [legal action against the Alberta Government](#).

These actions clearly reveal the Alberta government's indifference to the staggering death toll and toward people who use drugs—our neighbours, friends, family members, employees, colleagues and community members. The deaths will continue to rise as a result.

The government's messaging tries to deflect from the fact that their actions have effectively reduce SCS capacity across the province and that they have

Today, Albertans for Ethical Drug Policy and their partnered signatories listed below call on Albertans across the province to join us in demanding the following actions from the provincial government:

1. Retract the flawed SCS report and reopen closed sites in Lethbridge and at Boyle Street Community Services in Edmonton, maintain Calgary Safeworks, and open iOAT programs to new patients.
2. Open additional supervised consumption sites in Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer.
3. Fund low-barrier, community-accessible drug checking services to provide publicly available compositional data on the drug supply.

4. Reinstate all funding of Harm Reduction programs to historic services providers at 2019 levels.
5. Expand opioid agonist treatment programs and injectable opioid agonist treatment programs, including in correctional facilities.
6. Provide low-barrier access to safe pharmaceutical alternatives to toxic street drugs.
7. Cancel the implementation of the new regulations for supervised consumption sites that will impose additional barriers to accessing supervised consumption services.

We must not allow our communities to be destroyed by ideologically driven drug policy that ignores the scientific evidence in support of Harm Reduction, including supervised consumption services.

Please stand with us in solidarity for compassionate, evidence-based, and ethical drug policy. Write to your MLA. Share this letter. Consider donating to any of Alberta's Harm Reduction organizations.

Albertans for Ethical Drug Policy is a coalition of organizations, businesses, institutions, and individual advocates, experts, and people with lived/living experiences of criminalized drug use. This group was formed out of necessity when the Alberta UCP declared war on harm reduction and began systematically dismantling life-saving overdose prevention services in the province.

List of Signatories - Organizations

Alberta Addicts Who Educate & Advocate Responsibly (AAWEAR)
The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition
The Canadian Association of People who Use Drugs (CAPUD)
Moms Stop the Harm
EACH+EVERY: Businesses for Harm Reduction
HIV Legal Network
The Harm Reduction Nurses Association (HRNA)
Alberta Nurses Coalition for Harm Reduction (ANCHR)
Change the Face of Addiction
Friends of Medicare
Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy - National, Calgary, and Edmonton Chapters
Westside Harm Reduction
The Liam Project - Calgary
Be The Change YYC
Boots on Ground Harm Reduction
Alberta Public Health Association (APHA)
