

## **MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS ADVISORY COUNCIL – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

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**Question 3: What is the one recommendation that the Council could make that would support a stronger relationship between the Recovery Systems of Care and the Recovery Communities of Care?**

### **Short Response**

Addiction and mental health have genetic risks and significant implications for brain functioning and development. These can be chronic disorders with biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors that influence development and maintenance. **Systemic stigma reduction, seamless access, comprehensive assessments,** and integration of **holistic treatment** support a strong relationship between the recovery systems of care and recovery communities of care for addiction and mental health.

### **Systemic Stigma Reduction**

There is systemic stigma towards people living with substance misuse and mental health concerns. These are, ultimately, health concerns and all patients deserve treatment with the same parity as those with other health disorders. All services should be delivered compassionately and with respect for the dignity of the individuals struggling. For this, there needs to be agreement across systems of care or communities of care on shared recovery principles such as:

- Self-direction: that patients determine their own path to recovery
- Individualized/person-centered care: that there are multiple pathways to recovery based on individuals' unique strengths, needs, preferences, experiences and cultural backgrounds
- Empowerment: that patients can choose among options and participate in all decisions that affect them
- Holistic: that recovery focuses on people's entire lives, including mind, body, spirit and community
- Nonlinear: that recovery isn't a step-by-step process, but one based on continual growth, occasional setbacks and learning from experience
- Strengths-based: that recovery builds on people's strengths
- Peer support: that mutual support plays an invaluable role in recovery
- Respect: that acceptance and appreciation by society, communities, systems of care and consumers themselves are crucial to recovery.

## Linking Systems & Communities of Care

- Responsibility: that patients are responsible for their own self-care and journeys of recovery
- Hope: that recovery's central, motivating message is a better future — that people can and do overcome obstacles

### Example -- Understanding How People Change is First Step

The Alberta Family Wellness Initiative has worked across recovery systems of care and those in recovery communities of care to promote understanding of the brain story to improve outcomes in health and wellbeing for children and families across Alberta. The target was to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge about brain development, mental health, and addiction, and what is actually done in policy and practice.

The AFWI was created to perform this work and make these connections. The Brain Story puts scientific concepts into a narrative that is salient to both expert and non-expert audiences. Their free brain story certification is available to professionals and the public.

## Seamless Access

This access to systems of care and communities of care is optimized when it starts as early as possible on the developmental continuum. Schools are an essential place in which both systems can connect with students and families.

### Example – School Based Programs

Research on prevention and treatment of Cannabis misuse suggests that structured, school-based programs focused on making wise decisions about cannabis use, healthy coping, and substance use resistance skills offered in early adolescence can have strong effects on reducing cannabis use. Approximately 70% of mental health problems manifest before young adulthood and the greatest return on investment when it comes to mental health is an investment in children and youth. Mental health care delivered within the systems that serve children enables the early identification and remediation of mental health and developmental problems.

All Alberta students should have timely access to meaningful & effective School Psychology services. Absenting psychologists within the province's school systems is akin to absenting physicians from primary health care. Psychologists' unique expertise is critical to accurately assessing and diagnosing mental, behavioural and developmental problems and to delivering care to students who needs are complex.

## Linking Systems & Communities of Care

Another key area is research and practice. Researchers have developed effective behavioral and pharmaceutical therapies to treat addiction, but addiction treatment practice hasn't caught up with the science. Psychologists can help to close the gap between science and practice. There are many interrelated reasons for the science-practice gap in addiction and mental health treatment, including a long history of treating these as moral failings rather than disease. However, evidence-based treatments don't work as well in the community as they do in treatment centres. This is why the network and strong relationship is essential – and research needs to inform both recovery systems of care and recovery communities of care.

### **Comprehensive Assessments**

All interventions, within systems of care and within communities of care, must be anchored in comprehensive assessment. Well-informed, quality, assessments of physical and psychological health will identify and target both needs and greatest risks, as well as strengths.

Comprehensive assessments will identify cultural and trauma needs. All interventions and programs need to be culturally sensitive and trauma informed. Trauma-informed care seeks to create safety for clients by understanding the effects of trauma and its close links to health and behavior. It's about creating safe places that limit the potential for further harm.

Comprehensive assessments will also identify those Albertans most at risk who may require comprehensive treatment. Longer treatment periods, when required, are more likely to meet needs and stop a cycle of ineffective system access.

### **Holistic Treatment Considerations**

There is merit in treating typical outcomes of addiction or mental illness. These include:

- Social consequences – relationship issues, communication breakdowns,
- Role neglect -- parent, partner, or friend
- Occupational issues -- being unable to get to work on time, not going to work at all, or being unable to do or complete work tasks
- Legal consequences -- being arrested or convicted of offense
- Physical consequences – cravings, withdrawal symptoms, feeling sick or ill

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and to promote the well-being and potential of all Albertans.**

**PAA collaborates with government, health care, and stakeholders in advocating for science-based public policies such as these recommendations specific to cannabis legislation in Alberta.**