

## Substance Use Strategy Consultations

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*1. Current health promotion activities include the provincial Go Healthy campaign. What needs to be done to have a stronger health promotion approach to addressing problematic substance use?*

It is important that government take an integrated/collaborative approach to highlight awareness, and the importance, of the social determinants of health and the impact these determinants have on the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities, and problematic substance use. This would include increased linkages between the various provincial strategies (i.e., wellness, poverty reduction, healthy aging, primary health care, etc).

Government must maintain its' commitment to building healthy and vibrant communities through primary health care initiatives and community capacity building. From a health promotion perspective, it is crucial that communities be engaged in addressing the root causes of problematic substance abuse and affecting change at the local and provincial levels.

*2. What needs to be done to have a stronger prevention approach to addressing problematic substance use?*

Prevention is crucial in addressing problematic substance use and government needs to enhance funding to support prevention/early intervention work at the community level throughout each of the Regional Integrated Health Authorities.

It is also important that government support community organizations that work with youth "at risk". These organizations are fundamental in providing youth with access to the resources and supports they need to make healthy decisions within a supportive environment. Support for "non-traditional" education programs for youth who leave the mainstream education system also is important in keeping youth connected to essential services and supports within the community, while building on their strengths and capacities.

Public education is also a key component of prevention work. It is important that education on the risks of problematic substance use is increased, along with heightened community awareness of harm reduction.

*3. What are the most essential treatment services that are needed?*

It is important that all individuals living with an addiction have timely and appropriate access to essential services and supports when and where they need it. These services and supports include:

- Flexible treatment options (methadone treatment, non-medical detox, etc).
- Broad range of counseling options (brief therapy, long term counseling, and recovery support).
- Enhanced services for incarcerated individuals.
- Community support for individuals living with an addiction to reduce stigma and increase opportunities for early intervention.

*4. What additional harm reduction services are required in this province?*

Along with increased awareness and understanding of harm reduction, it is important that the province expand harm reduction services throughout the province as needed (i.e., needle exchange, methadone programming, etc). This will require a collaborative approach among the various health care professional groups, government, and the community.

*5. Are there changes to existing legislation or is there new legislation that would be helpful in addressing problematic substance use in this provinces?*

Timely court responses to prevent backlogs within the justice system is needed. It is recommended that the Department of Justice, in collaboration with key stakeholders, explore this issue and develop strategies for addressing this challenge.

The idea of a drug treatment court sounds interesting, but more evidence based research is needed. Perhaps this is something that could be linked to the mental health court when appropriate.

*6. What do we need to best address Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in this province?*

Prevention and early intervention is still the key in addressing FASD. Therefore, it is important that government continue to a) enhance services and supports to meet the specific needs of women with addiction issues, b) ensure timely access to services for women, c) expand public education initiatives, d) foster a healthy and supportive environment for women to increase prevention and early intervention strategies, and e) increase support services and early intervention for children living with FASD.

Again, from a public policy perspective, government must develop strategies and policies that address each of the social determinants of health (income and social status, social support networks, education, etc.). This will require a collaborative community approach.

*7. How can we best meet the specific needs of women and men in the province who experience problematic substance use?*

- Ensure that programs and policies are developed and evaluated through a gender lens.
- Involve persons who experience problematic substance use in the development and evaluation of programs and policies in a meaningful way.
- Provide an array of flexible treatment options that are available within the community.
- Heighten community awareness of problematic substance use and support for individuals that experience addiction.
- Continue to implement and advance the primary health care framework and involve communities in building strategies and solutions for addressing problematic substance use. It is crucial that government continue to develop strategies and programs that address health in the broadest perspective through the lens of the social determinants of health. Health policy is social policy!

*8. What is needed to ensure that our mental health and addiction systems provide coordinated care to individuals experiencing problematic substance use?*

It is important that individuals who experience problematic substance use have timely and appropriate access to services. This may require increased coordination between mental health and addiction systems to ensure sharing of

information that is appropriate, ease of referrals without long wait lists, and the implementation of primary health care principles (meeting the client where he/she is at, using a team based approach, etc).

*9. How do we achieve cultural sensitivity in service provision?*

- Listening to the community and developing partnerships – the community is the expert!
- Flexible programming that take into account cultural and community needs. In terms of Aboriginal issues, it is important that government continue to work with Aboriginal populations in developing culturally sensitive programs that meet their needs, while embracing diversity and respect.
- On-going professional development opportunities for staff within the Regional Integrated Health Authorities and community to promote best practices.

*10. How do we best meet the needs of persons with disabilities?*

It is essential that persons living with disabilities are engaged in the development of a strategy to address problematic substance use. Meaningful collaboration and investments in flexible and accessible programs and services is crucial. Again, the primary health care approach is necessary in addressing each of the social determinants of health to improve health. Poverty reduction is one area for example!

*11. Please provide comments on the vision, principles and priorities we have outlined for addressing problematic substance use in this province?*

The key areas are addressed within the vision, principles and priorities. In order to move this framework forward, funding and resource allocation are crucial along with the development of partnerships and collaboration. Social workers play an essential and integral role in a) working with individuals who experience problematic substance use, b) prevention and early intervention, c) community engagement and primary health care, and d) social policy analysis. The NLASW looks forward to working with government in moving this strategy forward.