Executive Summary

The opioid crisis has had a significant impact on Grande Prairie. Community agencies, service providers, and emergency responders have rallied efforts to respond to the crisis and to support people struggling with opioid addictions and overdoses. The Community Opioid Response Task Force was established in 2017 by Mayor Bill Given, to facilitate dialogue among municipal government, community social services, health agencies, law enforcement, and community members in response to the opioid crisis. The Community Opioid Response Recommendations presented here are an output of the collaboration of this Task Force.

Three elements underpin the Community Opioid Response: Collaboration among community members, the significance of culture in responding to the opioid crisis, and the importance of ensuring community responses are based on data and evidence. The Community Opioid Response Recommendations are presented using a four pillar model that encompasses the multiple dimensions of the opioid crisis. The four mutually supporting pillars are prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and policing. Broad recommendations for community stakeholders are presented within each pillar where gaps have been identified.

The Community Opioid Response Recommendations provide an initial framework to support the community’s response to the opioid crisis. Through consultations with service providers and community members, these recommendations broadly identify areas where community capacity can be strengthened to support those struggling with opioid addictions and increase community well-being.
# Table of Contents

**Mayor’s Introduction** 1

**Community Opioid Response in Grande Prairie** 2
  - Community Context 2
  - The Approach 3
  - Implementation 4

**Grande Prairie Community Opioid Response Task Force** 5
  - Pillar One: Prevention 7
  - Pillar Two: Harm Reduction 8
  - Pillar Three: Treatment and Recovery 9
  - Pillar Four: Policing 10

**Community Resources** 11
  - References 12
Mayor’s Introduction

Grande Prairie is a blessed community where we have the good fortune to enjoy tremendous opportunity, high levels of prosperity and a great degree of personal safety. However, as a community, we are not immune to societal trends such as increasing social isolation, mental health challenges, and addiction.

Like many North American communities, Grande Prairie has been touched by the trauma and death arising from the opioid crisis. Too many lives have been lost, too many families have been torn apart, and too many of our friends, neighbours, and co-workers are dealing with heartbreaking burdens.

As a community, we must act.

It is in this context that Grande Prairie’s community opioid response plan was developed and while the plan offers avenues for all of us to have a meaningful impact in addressing this human crisis, it is also essential to understand what this plan is not.

First, even though the City is delivering the plan, it should not be viewed as a work product of the municipal government. In fact, this plan is the result of a cross-sectorial dialogue that was led by people with lived experience, health professionals, the business community, law enforcement, educators, and service providers working on the front lines.

Second, the plan is not a step by step instruction manual that purports to hold all the answers for “solving, once and for all” the opioid crisis in Grande Prairie. To the contrary, this plan is grounded in an acknowledgment that the crisis is multifaceted, multi-stakeholder, systemic, intensely personal in nature and ever-evolving.

This plan is a call to action.

It identifies areas where we should focus our efforts, both together as a community and individuals within our own spheres of control. This plan should be viewed as a first iteration in what must be an ongoing collaborative effort within our community. As we move forward, new challenges will be uncovered, and new approaches will be required. From time to time we will need to reassess and redirect our efforts.

I encourage you to read on, reflect on the recommendations and consider what role you (or your organization) might play in moving our community forward toward a future where people who use drugs receive the supports they require and where families don’t lose loved ones needlessly.

Mayor Bill Given
Opioid Response Strategy

- Cultural Consideration
- Data Collection
- Collaboration

- Treatment & Recovery
- Prevention
- Policing
- Harm Reduction
Since 2016, at least 9,000 people in Canada have died as a result of opioids. Across Canada, there were 2,066 opioid related deaths in the first half of 2018 alone. 523 Albertans lost their lives to accidental opioid poisoning in 2018, with an average of two deaths every day.

In Grande Prairie, individuals, families, community agencies, and government entities have been grappling with the effects of opioid use in the community for a number of years. Efforts from health, social services, and enforcement providers have been invaluable in keeping the community safe and trying to respond to the needs of residents. In December 2017, the Community Opioid Response Task Force was initiated by Mayor Bill Given to address the opioid crisis.

Although the impacts of opioid use cannot be completely erased, local responses can be implemented to: increase prevention efforts, reduce risks associated with opioid use, educate to increase awareness and reduce stigma, and to identify resources for treatment and social supports. The Community Opioid Response Task Force and the Community Opioid Response Recommendations are the result of collaboration between municipal government, health and social service organizations, law enforcement, and members of the community with lived-experience.

The City of Grande Prairie is home to over 63,166 residents. A quick demographic snapshot highlights some of the unique elements of Grande Prairie. The population is young – the median age is 31.2. 71.2% of the population of Grande Prairie is between 15 and 65 years of age. In 2015, the median income for households was $105,555, and the prevalence of low-income households was 7.2%. Grande Prairie serves as an economic and service hub for quite a significant region of Northern Alberta and Eastern British Columbia. Grande Prairie also has a consistently growing population. These characteristics have contributed to Grande Prairie’s economic strength, with robust programs and services that work to serve the City.

Grande Prairie’s demographic and economic features also contribute to some of the challenges of the opioid crisis. The City’s demographic traits mirror those affected most by the opioid crisis. For example, thus far in 2018, it was males between 30 and 34 and females between 35 and 39 that had the highest rates of death from accidental opioid poisoning. Data on hospitalization rates across Canada suggests that hospitalization related to opioid poisoning is 2.5 higher in communities between 50,000 and 99,000 compared to the country’s largest cities.

In 2017, Grande Prairie had the highest rate of fentanyl overdose related deaths among the largest municipalities in Alberta. Grande Prairie also topped the list of “EMS responses to opioid related events” followed by Red Deer and Lethbridge. 2018 reports thus far indicate that the rate of fentanyl related opioid poisoning deaths in Grande Prairie has decreased, with the highest rates being reported in Red Deer and Lethbridge. Despite these reductions, the impacts of opioid use continue to be felt in the community. Individuals, families, community agencies, and government entities have been grappling with the effects of opioid use in the community. Front-line and first responders in Grande Prairie have been integral in working to prevent overdoses and advocate for people struggling with addictions.

There are already many initiatives, activities, supports, and advocacy efforts as a response to the opioid crisis in Grande Prairie. Detox, medication assisted treatment, and residential treatment options are available. Community organizations offer access to harm reduction supplies and provide supports to maintain housing. Outreach services are available to engage with people where they are at, and there is a partnership between police and mental health workers through the Police and Crisis Team (PACT). The Community Opioid Response Task Force acknowledges that efforts are already underway in the community.
The Approach

The Community Opioid Response Recommendations were developed by a four pillar subcommittee struck by the Community Opioid Response Task Force. The document outlines recommendations within four mutually supporting pillars: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, and policing. A four pillar approach ensures that each element is addressed at the same time, with the recognition that focusing only on one element of substance use does not provide sufficient support for people affected.

In Grande Prairie’s Community Opioid Response Recommendations, the four pillars are supported by three supporting elements: collaboration, culture, and data. These elements are considered foundational to the pillars and their associated activities. The Community Opioid Response Recommendations in this document were informed by service providers, community members, and organizations who are on the front-lines of the opioid crisis. Service providers and organizations were invited to participate in consultations. The feedback from these consultations is reflected in these documents.

The Community Opioid Response Recommendations provide an initial framework to support the community’s response to the opioid crisis. Through consultations with service providers and community members, these recommendations broadly identify areas where community capacity can be strengthened to support those struggling with opioid addictions and increase community well-being.

It is important to keep in mind that broad goals have been identified through these recommendations. Best practice for achieving each element has not necessarily been identified at this stage. The reason for this is two-fold. First, each element in this framework requires the collaboration of multiple actors and stakeholders. Responsibility for these recommendations does not lie with one agency, organization, or department – deliberations and decision-making to realize the recommendations requires community collaboration in design and delivery. Second, further exploration needs to be undertaken to identify how elements of these recommendations can be best implemented to ensure they reflect Grande Prairie’s unique needs. Further engagement will ensure that the voices of those impacted by the opioid crisis in Grande Prairie are reflected in dialogue and decision making.

It is also important to acknowledge that the process of identifying the recommendations and developing action-plans to achieve these recommendations is iterative. It is through the consultation process and deliberations to implement strategies that the specific needs of the community and the challenges faced in addressing those needs will be best understood. As such, adjustments to the recommendations and strategies are expected to be part of the process of realizing progress in all four pillars. It is also expected that steps taken to address one pillar will have effects on the others, highlighting the need for collaboration throughout.

Grande Prairie’s Community Response Recommendations align with efforts by the provincial and federal governments to address the opioid crisis. The 2017 resolution of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association advocating a Provincial/Municipal Working Group on Opioids articulates the necessity of engaging multiple levels of government in addressing the opioid crisis. The Province of Alberta developed a Minister’s Opioid Emergency Response Commission in May 2017. In May 2018, Mayor Bill Given was appointed to this Commission and serves as the only representation from Northern Alberta on the commission. On July 5, 2018, the provincial Opioid Emergency Response Commission produced 32 recommendations for the Minister. Some of these recommendations include funding and increasing spaces for treatment, funding for awareness projects, funding for existing and new supervised consumption services in cities including Grande Prairie, and expanding the community based Naloxone Program. Canada’s federal drug strategy also uses a four pillar approach. Prevention, Treatment, Harm Reduction, and Enforcement are the key pillars in the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy, supported by evidence. Examples of federal responses to the opioid crisis include the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act and the granting of exemptions for overdose prevention sites. The policy initiatives undertaken by the federal and provincial governments reflect the jurisdiction of different levels of government. Each level of government has a role to play in preventing and addressing opioid use.
Implementation

Implementing services and programs that address the gaps identified by the Community Opioid Response Recommendations will require collaboration among community organizations, service providers, and the City of Grande Prairie. The breadth of the opioid crisis means that no single entity can effectively address the four-pillars on its own – a collective response is required.

To help facilitate a collective response, Community Social Development (CSD), City of Grande Prairie will act as the back-bone organization for the Community Opioid Response. In this role, on behalf of the City, CSD will offer administrative and organizational support, facilitate dialogue among involved stakeholders, and assist with evaluation.

It is expected that a working group will be established for each of the pillars comprised of members of the task force, people affected by the opioid crisis, and experts from the community. It is anticipated that these working groups will identify concrete strategies to achieve the recommendations and support their implementation. Further engagement on these elements may be valuable to identify how best they can serve the community.
The City of Grande Prairie would like to thank the following community stakeholders for contributing their time, resources, and expertise to the development of The City of Grande Prairie Community Response Recommendations.

An element of fluidity in individual involvement must be acknowledged. We thank all who contributed and recognize that this is not an exhaustive list.

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Mayor Bill Given, City of Grande Prairie
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Tyla Savard, Community member, Regional Leader – Moms Stop the Harm
Pillar One: Prevention

A range of education and awareness initiatives are needed to help address various elements of opioid use in the community. Since this is a community issue, prevention efforts need to increase access to information, educate about preventing substance use disorders and overdoses, and ensure that people in the community know where to turn for information and support. Prevention efforts need to be shaped to reduce stigma and shift the language around opioid use.

Community Response Recommendations:

1. Coordinate existing education resources in the community for ease of access so that individuals and groups looking for education and presentation resources can find the resource that best suits their needs.

2. Collaborate to develop and share education resources for Grande Prairie residents including children and youth, adults, seniors, the medical community, and the private sector.

3. Ensure that new resources are accessible for different population groups including people with disabilities, newcomers to Canada, and people facing other access challenges.

4. Maintain an awareness of the role opioids play in chronic pain management and raise public awareness of prescribing practices and regulatory changes.

5. Focus efforts on educating and supporting parents and caregivers in order to provide early intervention strategies for youth.

6. Identify how youth and community programming can be strengthened to increase capacity around prevention and/or reduction of substance use.

7. Increase education and awareness efforts to reduce stigma around mental health and substance use disorders.

8. Engage with the Indigenous community to identify how Indigenous ways of knowing can be best reflected in harm prevention initiatives in the community.
Pillar Two: Harm Reduction

Harm reduction practices are intended to reduce some elements of harm associated with using drugs. Harm reduction “refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim primarily to reduce the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of legal and illegal psychoactive drugs without necessarily reducing drug consumption.”

Harm reduction policies can save lives by providing access to safer supplies and access to Naloxone. Pairing harm reduction strategies with social supports (e.g. housing, mental health, transit) provides wrap around services to support people who use opioids and people in recovery.

Community Response Recommendations:

1. Increase local public education around the practice of harm reduction by increasing awareness and reducing stigma, focusing on public education and educating the community and government agencies.

2. Analyze and identify options for safer consumption sites, such as overdose prevention sites, or supervised consumption services with relation to community needs.

3. Explore the viability and relevance of substance checking services options.

4. Ensure that there are adequate and appropriate resources and facilities to ensure the safe disposal of drug paraphernalia, including providing accurate and accessible instructional resources.

5. Explore how community needs can be better met by outreach services.

6. Ensure Naloxone is available and accessible to assist in managing overdoses, and, broaden the delivery of overdose prevention training.

7. Identify how outreach services, harm reduction resources and educational materials can target members of the population who may not regularly use drugs or may not be street engaged.

8. Engage with the Indigenous community to identify how Indigenous ways of knowing can be best reflected in harm reduction initiatives in the community.
Pillar Three: Treatment and Recovery

Treatment and recovery might start in different places for different people and as such this pillar recognizes the need for the development of diverse programs and services offered at different levels including: community outreach programs, counselling and mental health services, and residential treatment programs.

There are systemic barriers to participating in detox programs and often the available services are insufficient to support a person into recovery. In order to support people into recovery, access to treatment at the community level needs to be available, accessible, and culturally relevant.

Community Response Recommendations:

1. Work with provincial and federal partners to increase funding for, and access to, treatment options including medication-assisted treatment of opioid dependency, detox treatment, residential treatment and counselling.

2. Explore how the outreach system can be best equipped with the resources to meet the corresponding need of people who are working towards recovery.

3. Advocate and facilitate the development of housing options that can help support people in treatment and recovery.

4. Explore opportunities to increase quantity and diversity of housing and social support services that can be accessed upon return from treatment centres and prisons.

5. Advocate to the provincial and federal governments to develop protocol for treatment for people who are incarcerated and/or who are leaving the prison system to ensure consistent treatment is available and funded, including withdrawal management.

6. Centralize information on available treatment and recovery resources, including resources for youth and families, and supports to maintain recovery.

7. Explore the development of treatment alternatives rooted in Indigenous principles (such as land based treatment options).
Pillar Four: Policing

The Policing Pillar highlights the importance of local enforcement services in addressing opioid use, dependence, and preventing fatal overdoses. Enforcement services play multiple roles in addressing the opioid crisis: as first responders to emergent situations and in ensuring community safety by addressing the broader illegal dimensions of the opioid crisis.

Community Response Recommendations:

1. Encourage increased collaboration and dialogue between enforcement services and community stakeholders.

2. Identify the viability of a “Bad Batch” alert and response system that notifies the community of opioid overdoses.

3. Increase awareness of the “Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act”.

4. Identify policies and processes for community members to dispose of opioids safely.

5. Ensure that enforcement services are aware of available support resources including social, health, and treatment resources.

6. Explore potential for expanding Police and Crisis Team and extending hours.

7. Advocate to the appropriate authorities for an increased focus on preventing the flow of illicit substances into Canada.
Community Resources:

**ACT Medical:** 587-259-2681  
- Methadone and Suboxone Clinics

**Alberta Health Services**
- Integrated Crisis Access Team: 587-259-5513  
- Grande Prairie Mental Health Services: 780-538-5160  
- Single Session Walk-In Counselling Services: 780-538-5160  
- AHS Addiction and Mental Health: 780-538-6330  
  - Adult Counselling Services  
  - Recovery and Relapse Prevention  
  - Friends and Family Group

**Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta Northwest Region (CMHA ANWR):** 780-814-2349

**HIV North Society:** 780-538-3388  
- Harm Reduction  
- Naloxone training and take home naloxone  
- Education presentations  
- Outreach services

**Northern Addictions Centre:** 780-538-5210  
- Detox and residential treatment

**Help Lines**  
(24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Alberta Health Services Addictions Help Line: 1-866-332-2322

Alberta Mental Health Help Line: 1-877-303-2642

Health Link: 811

Mental Health Help Line  
(Suicide Distress Line): 1-877-321-2747

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868
References


City of Grande Prairie. 2018 Economic Profile.


Community Response Recommendations:

1. Work with provincial and federal partners to increase funding for, and access to, treatment options including medication-assisted treatment of opioid dependency, detox treatment, residential treatment and counselling.

2. Explore how the outreach system can be best equipped with the resources to meet the corresponding need of people who are working towards recovery.

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