



News Release

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PLANNING, LEADERSHIP, RESOURCES LACKING FOR YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

VICTORIA – Youth with substance use problems in British Columbia are faced with a piecemeal service system that can leave them for long periods of time without adequate or available services as they try to access treatment, finds a report released today by Representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond.

A Review of Youth Substance Use Services in B.C. calls on the provincial government to recognize the magnitude of the issue by creating a single point of leadership that would collaborate with regional health authorities on a strategic plan focusing on prevention, early intervention and residential treatment. This plan must include adequate resources to develop and implement a comprehensive system of substance use services, with specific attention paid to the service-delivery needs of Aboriginal youth and families.

“Challenges faced by youth using alcohol and other drugs are evident in the every-day work of my Office,” Turpel-Lafond said. “The reality is that B.C. youth are often not getting help when and where they need it and the opportunity to prevent longer-term consequences for them and their families is missed. This province has a shortage of residential treatment beds and spotty availability of services in various regions. Getting the right intervention for substance use issues where these youth live is crucial to their future well-being.”

This review looked at publicly funded substance use treatment services for youth ages 13 to 18, focusing on services delivered by B.C.’s health authorities, which are funded by the Ministry of Health (MoH). It specifically examined how available these services are and how responsive they are to the needs of specific groups of youth – including Aboriginal, LGBT2Q+ and pregnant or parenting youth – as well as the policy and standards that guide them.

Information for this review was gathered through a survey of all publicly funded service providers who offer youth substance use services in B.C., as well as interviews with service providers, health authority representatives, MoH, the Mental Health and Substance Use Agency and the First Nations Health Authority. The review was guided by an external advisory committee.

A number of barriers for youth seeking treatment were identified in the review, including difficulties in moving from school or hospital emergency departments to community-based services, where they can face wait-times that discourage them from seeking further supports. Other barriers to services include lack of flexibility in hours of operation, lack of developmentally or culturally appropriate options, and issues of trust stemming from discrimination toward those with substance use problems.

This review also finds that there is a long way to go to meet the needs of B.C.'s diverse youth population, including Aboriginal youth, and recommends that the appropriate ministries and the health authorities take steps to eliminate stigma and discrimination toward youth with substance use problems through broad-based educational activities aimed at both professionals and the public.

Turpel-Lafond said comprehensive leadership is required in government to tackle issues of youth substance use service delivery, quality assurance, standards and workforce capacity.

“There is major work to be undertaken in B.C. to pull together a true system of substance use services,” Turpel-Lafond said. “A single point of responsibility is necessary to ensure that major issues such as gaps in services and wait-times are addressed, and to build robust community-based services that reflect the needs of B.C.'s children and youth.”

This report is available at: <http://www.rcybc.ca/substanceuse>

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