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# ***Executive Leaders Coalition on Opioid Use***

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

August 9, 2017

**Lethbridge** – With the full support of the Lethbridge Executive Leaders Coalition on Opioid Use, ARCHES, a local harm reduction agency, submitted a comprehensive application to Health Canada on July 31, 2017.

Alberta’s Health Minister is putting her support firmly behind this application to establish Supervised Consumption Services in Lethbridge to respond to the growing crisis of opioid use.

“Supervised Consumption Services saves lives, and they are a vital component of Alberta’s broader opioid emergency response, says Alberta Health Minister Sarah Hoffman.

Minister Hoffman goes on to state, “The application to provide these services in Lethbridge is the product of hard work from Mayor Chris Spearman and City Council, the Lethbridge Police Service, Lethbridge’s harm reduction agency ARCHES, and the other members of the Lethbridge Executive Leaders Coalition on Opioid Use. I commend them for their passionate advocacy, and the Government of Alberta is pleased to support their application. I know that families, first responders, and all residents of Lethbridge have been hit hard by the opioid emergency.

“Lethbridge is the third community in Alberta to submit an application to Health Canada. I urge Health Canada to approve these applications as expeditiously as possible. We look forward to working with additional Alberta communities where Supervised Consumption Services can reduce harm and prevent families from losing loved ones.”

Stacey Bourque, Executive Director of ARCHES, says a decision from Health Canada on the application is expected later this year and that ARCHES will work with federal representatives to ensure all requirements are met in order to receive an approval.

“The site identified in the application, at 1016-1 Avenue South, emerged through a site-selection process that centred around the following criteria: its close proximity to primary areas where public drug use occurs, the high incidence of overdoses occurring within a 1.5-km radius of the identified site, its proximity to public transit, and the fact that it is well away from residential neighbourhoods,” Bourque says.

Supervised Consumption Services are a permitted use under the existing land-use zoning for the site. ARCHES will relocate its existing harm reduction operations to the new site and integrate Supervised Consumption Services into its current programming. Bourque says the agency is dedicated to continuing community engagement and is committed to being a good neighbour. Staff will immediately begin contacting neighbouring businesses to create strong lines of communication.

Earlier this summer, after completing a community needs assessment and studying community addiction strategies worldwide, the Coalition determined that Supervised Consumption Services would be an effective intervention model to reduce harm from drug use and help save lives. The Coalition is a group of organizations that began meeting in the fall of 2016 to improve the coordination of services to respond effectively to the opioid crisis and explore the feasibility of implementing Supervised Consumption Services.

The goal of this group is to collaborate on a coordinated community approach to effectively address the growing issue of opioid abuse in Lethbridge. This comprehensive strategy includes Prevention, Early Intervention, Harm Reduction, Treatment, and Rehabilitation.

The Coalition hosted a series of community discussion sessions in July to provide information and answer questions from Lethbridge residents.

*For additional information, please refer to the attached Backgrounder.*

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## **Backgrounder:**

### **The current crisis of opioid use**

Alberta is facing a substance use-related health crisis. Currently, more Albertans are dying each year from drug overdoses than at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We are losing people at a rate greater than one per day. These numbers are increasing each quarter, and based on the current trend, we expect an even higher number of deaths in 2017 than in 2016.

- In 2016, a total of 559 Albertans died from drug overdoses related to opioids:
  - 363 of these deaths were attributed to either fentanyl or carfentanil
  - 196 of these deaths were attributed to other opioids
- In the first quarter of 2017, 117 Albertans died from drug overdoses related to fentanyl or carfentanil (as compared to 70 people in the first quarter of 2016). We do not have data on the number of people who died from other opioid overdoses in the first quarter of 2017.
- Across 2016, the South zone (which includes Lethbridge) saw the highest rate of emergency department visits: approximately 24% higher than the provincial average.

### **Coalition member organizations**

The ***Lethbridge Executive Leaders Coalition on Opioid Use*** is a group of organizations that began meeting in the fall of 2016 to improve the coordination of services to respond effectively to the opioid crisis and explore the feasibility of implementing Supervised Consumption Services.

The goal of this group is to collaborate on a coordinated community approach to effectively address the growing issue of opioid abuse in Lethbridge. This comprehensive strategy includes Prevention, Early Intervention, Harm Reduction, Treatment and Rehabilitation. Because of the present epidemic of deaths from opioid-related overdoses, much of the coalition's initial focus has been on enhancing our local approaches to Harm Reduction.

The coalition includes representatives from:

- Alberta Health Services
- Alberta Children's Services
- Alberta Justice and Solicitor General
- ARCHES (AIDS Outreach Community Harm Reduction Education Support) Society
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- City of Lethbridge
- Holy Spirit Catholic Schools
- Lethbridge College
- Downtown Lethbridge BRZ
- Lethbridge Fire and Emergency Services
- Lethbridge Police Service
- Lethbridge Public Library
- Lethbridge School District #51
- Sik-Ooh-Kotoki Friendship Centre
- Social Housing In Action
- University of Lethbridge

The coalition is focused on ensuring access to the full spectrum of evidence-based health care practices for people who use drugs. This benefits substance users as well as the community.

## **What are Supervised Consumption Services?**

Supervised Consumption Services (SCS) provide a safe, clean space for people who use drugs to do so under the supervision of health care professionals without the fear of arrest or accidental overdose. Access to support services such as counselling, education, and treatment for drug addictions is also provided.

***Here's a snapshot of what Supervised Consumption Services are and how they benefit communities:***

[http://www.fraserhealth.ca/media/20170130\\_Supervised\\_Consumption\\_Services.pdf](http://www.fraserhealth.ca/media/20170130_Supervised_Consumption_Services.pdf)

Supervised Consumption Services are part of a range of evidence-based interventions that include prevention, harm reduction and treatment for members of our community living with substance use challenges.

### ***Benefits of Supervised Consumption Services:***

- Fewer overdose deaths
- Fewer discarded needles in public places
- Less public drug use
- Less transmission of HIV and Hepatitis C from better access to clean needles
- Increased use of detox and addiction treatment services resulting in improved health outcomes
- Reduced petty crime in the vicinity of the Supervised Consumption Services facility

### ***Supervised Consumption Services help save lives and foster safer communities.***

Along with offering needle exchange, naloxone, and access to opioid dependency treatment, Supervised Consumption Services help reduce harms from substance abuse such as HIV, Hepatitis C, bacterial infections and overdose deaths.

Supervised Consumption Services have proven to save lives while being cost effective, and foster a safer environment for people who use drugs as well as for the general public.

For the past 30 years, Supervised Consumption Services have been part of a wider range of harm reduction programs in many places across the globe, including Canada.

Supervised Consumption Services reflect a growing understanding by both policy makers and the public that drug use is not a moral failing, but rather a public health issue that needs to be addressed through evidence-based health and social interventions.

## What is Harm Reduction?

The term Harm Reduction refers to policies, programs, and practices that aim to reduce the harms and death associated with drug use. Harm Reduction approaches are based on evidence and science, are rooted in compassion and justice, and seek to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Harm Reduction uses non-judgmental, strength-based services that provide skills, knowledge, resources, and supports for people involved in high-risk behaviours to live safer and healthier lives.

Harm Reduction is one component in a range of healthcare services and is implemented most effectively alongside as well as within other approaches including Prevention, Early Intervention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation.

Harm Reduction services enable people who are often isolated by their addiction to be accepted “where they are at” and provided non-judgmental services appropriate to their state of readiness. Harm reduction includes stopping drug use.

Harm Reduction services will frequently act as an entry point to services, providing an individual with access to further supports that they may not have otherwise connected with.

Harm Reduction is highly effective in reaching vulnerable and marginalized populations, and reaching community members who may not access traditional healthcare systems. Data on the provincial naloxone program supports the effectiveness of Harm Reduction agencies in improving access to care for these populations.

*Although Harm Reduction agencies make up only 8 of the 1,095 (0.7%) provincial sites that are registered to distribute naloxone kits, they have collectively distributed 35% of the Naloxone kits in Alberta since January 2016.*