



## **NATIONAL ADDICTIONS AWARENESS WEEK** **November 21-27, 2021**

Alberta Health Services, Addictions and Mental Health in Peace River is celebrating National Addictions Awareness Week this year from November 21 - 27, 2021. National Addictions Awareness Week began in Eastern Canada in 1980, and at the time it was referred to as Drug Awareness Week. In 1987, the Honorable Jake Epp, Minister of Health and Welfare Canada, proclaimed the third week in November as National Addictions Awareness Week (NAAW), a week to promote public awareness and involvement on issues related to all addictions.

Over the years, communities in Alberta have celebrated coming together during the third week of November to organize events to provide information, raise awareness, and to promote prevention of tobacco, substance abuse and gambling problems. NAAW is a time to celebrate addictions-free lifestyles; many individuals embrace NAAW as a time to reflect and consider change.

The AHS Addictions Outpatient area office in Peace River has organized and participated in National Addictions Awareness Week celebrations since 1987. For many years, the theme of NAAW was “Keep the Circle Strong” and the picture at the top of our **NAAW Information Bulletin** is a picture taken in approximately 1985 in the north end of Peace River in the field where the new arena now stands. Children and teachers from Springfield, McGrath and Good Shepherd Schools, as well as many community members, the RCMP, Fire Department and Ambulance Services all gathered in a large circle to celebrate NAAW and to participate in our “Keep the Circle Strong” events.

As COVID-19 continues, it remains challenging to organize public participation events for NAAW. Last year, AHS Addictions Services in Peace River partnered with Peace River Broadcasting to promote the NAAW theme of “Change Begins with Me” focusing on positive thoughts and behaviors by highlighting songs, poems, movies, positive sayings, affirmations, activities, and things to be grateful for, encouraging and inspiring community members as they move through change.

## **PEACE RIVER ADDICTION SERVICES**

**Office hours are  
Monday – Friday  
8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

**Addiction & Mental  
Health Building  
10015 – 98 St,  
Peace River, AB  
T8S 1T4**

**Available to all  
Albertans: adults, youth,  
family, and friends**

**National Addictions  
Awareness week is  
Nov 21 – 27, 2021**

**For more information or  
to schedule an  
appointment with an  
Addictions Counsellor call  
780-624-6151**

**Outpatient services are  
voluntary, confidential,  
and free of charge.**

During NAAW this year, Addictions Services in Peace River is providing an Addictions Information Bulletin focused on ***“You and Substance Use ... stuff to think about... and should I make changes!”*** Information provided in this information bulletin is provided from The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

## **What is Addiction?**

Did you ever think about your relationship with substances or, did you ever question your attitudes and actions related to substances? The way substances affect individuals is unique and may be influenced by our genetics, life experiences, influences, and our personalities. When people use the same substances, the effects may be very different. For example, one person may feel relaxed after one drink, another individual may begin to feel angry. Some individuals may feel more energy after smoking marijuana while another person may experience paranoia and anxiety.

The word “addiction” is often used to refer to any behavior that is out of control in some way. People often describe themselves as being addicted to, for example, a TV show or shopping. Addiction is also used to explain the experience of withdrawal when a substance or behavior (e.g., alcohol use or gambling) is stopped (e.g. “I must be addicted to coffee: I get a headache when I don’t have my cup in the morning”). However, experiencing enjoyment or going through withdrawal do not in themselves mean a person has an addiction.

Because the term “addiction” is commonly used in such a vague way, there have been many attempts to define it more clearly. The definition used below (CAMH) refers to problematic use of a substance such as alcohol.

**One simple way of describing addiction is the presence of the 4 Cs:**

- Craving
- Loss of Control of amount or frequency of use
- Compulsion to use
- Use despite Consequences

## **Signs & Symptoms**

The harms of substance use can range from mild (e.g. feeling hungover, being late for work) to severe (e.g. homelessness, disease). While each time a person uses a substance it may seem to have little impact, the harmful consequences can build up over time. A person who keeps using substances despite the harmful consequences may develop a substance use problem.

The harms of substance use can affect every aspect of a person’s life. They include:

- injuries while under the influence
- feelings of anxiety, irritability, or depression
- trouble thinking clearly
- blackouts
- problems with relationships
- spending money on substances rather than on food, rent or other essentials
- legal problems related to substance use
- loss of hope, feelings of emptiness

Some people may be aware that their substance use causes problems but continue to use, even when they want to stop. They may use more than they intended or in situations where they didn't want to use.

**Some people may not see that their substance use is out of control and is causing problems (denial).** This so-called denial, however, may simply be a lack of awareness or insight into the situation. Whether people realize it or not, lack of control is another sign that substance use is a problem.

## Causes & Risk Factors

**People become addicted because of a combination of factors.**

- **Genetic factors:** Some people may inherit a vulnerability to the addictive properties of drugs.
- **How drugs interact with the brain:** People use alcohol and other drugs because they stimulate the brain in ways that "feel good." This immediate rewarding experience makes people want to repeat it. All substances with addictive potential stimulate the release of dopamine, a chemical in the brain that is associated with reward and pleasure.
- **Environment:** Peoples' home and community and the attitude of their peers, family and culture toward substance use can influence whether or not they develop substance use problems. People who experience prejudice or marginalization may use substances to cope with feelings of trauma or social isolation.
- **Mental health issues:** More than 50 per cent of people with substance use disorders have also had mental health problems at some point during their lifetimes. When people have mental health problems, even limited substance use can worsen the problem.
- **Coping with thoughts and feelings:** People may turn to substances as a way of coping with difficult emotions or situations. They start to rely on substances to regulate their emotions.

Researchers have tried various ways to sort out the complex causes of substance use problems. One way is to ask which factors put people at risk and which protect them from substance use problems. Since substance use often begins in youth, research has focused on this age group.

**Risk factors for substance use problems in youth include:**

- alcohol or other drug problems among family members
- poor school performance
- poverty, family conflicts, chaos, or stress
- having friends who drink or use drugs
- not fitting in socially or being excluded because of factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation
- emotional, physical, or sexual abuse
- experiencing discrimination or oppression

**The protective factors for substance use problems include:**

- having a positive adult role model
- good parental or other caregiver supervision
- having a strong attachment to family, school, and community

- having goals and dreams
- being involved in meaningful well-supervised activities (e.g. sports, volunteer work)

## Addiction Screening

Screening questionnaires can help to quickly identify a substance use problem or determine the level of dependence.

### CAGE questions:

1. Have you ever tried to **C**ut down on your drinking or other drug use?
2. Have you ever felt **A**ngry at or annoyed by someone else's comments about your drinking or other drug use?
3. Have you ever felt **G**uilty about your drinking or other drug use?
4. Have you ever used alcohol or other drugs as an **E**ye-opener—that is, have you used first thing in the morning?

Once a substance use problem is identified or suspected, addiction counsellors or health care providers will ask about:

- the degree of use
- the consequences of use
- the person's readiness to engage in treatment

## Addiction Treatment

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to addiction treatment.

Choosing the appropriate treatment depends on the severity and type of addiction; the support available from family, friends, and others; and the person's motivation to change.

### Self help

- **Self-help:** Some people with substance use problems are able to make changes on their own using self-help materials (e.g. self-help books and websites).
- **Self-help groups:** Support people who are working to change their substance use. Many people participate in a self-help group at the same time that they are in formal treatment. The oldest and largest self-help organization is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Today, there are many self-help groups with various philosophies and approaches for people with substance use problems.

### Harm reduction

To reach out to people who may not be ready, willing, or able to give up substances, some treatment programs have adopted a harm reduction approach.

Examples of harm reduction strategies include:

- helping people learn safer ways to use substances
- helping people learn how to recognize the signs of an overdose
- providing clean needles and other injection equipment for injection drug use (to reduce transmission of infections such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C through needle sharing)
- helping to ensure that people's basic needs, such as for food, shelter, and medical care, are met
- substituting a safer drug for the one a person is using (e.g. substituting methadone for heroin)

### **Addiction Counselling**

Counselling comes in a variety of forms, including individual, group, [couples and family therapy](#). Counselling generally aims to:

- increase people's awareness of how substance use affects their lives, what puts them at risk of substance use and how to reduce substance use
- help people examine their thoughts and emotions and learn how these inner experiences affect how they behave, how they interact with others and how others see them
- help promote physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness
- help people manage cravings and temptations to use substances
- help people with substance use problems meet their needs through assertive communication
- help people find ways to meet people and form relationships that aren't focused on substance use

### **Alcohol and other drug education**

Alcohol and other drug education can help people learn about the effects of alcohol and other drugs, and support people in making informed choices. Some treatment programs also offer alcohol and other drug education to family members.

### **Medications**

Treatment using medications should always be paired with at least brief counselling or, if available, a structured treatment program.

### **Withdrawal management**

People sometimes need short-term help dealing with substance use withdrawal. Withdrawal management helps them manage symptoms that happen when they stop using the substance. It helps prepare clients for long-term treatment. Clients also learn about substance use and treatment options.

### **Other supports and services**

Many treatment programs offer a variety of other supports and services, including information and counselling about:

- stress or anger management

- grief and trauma
- finding a job or going back to school
- healthy eating
- accessing safe, affordable housing
- getting social assistance or disability benefits
- managing money and budgeting
- developing parenting skills

*Adapted from Addiction: An Information Guide © 2010 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.*

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Why do people keep using substances?**

One thing that makes change so difficult is that the immediate effects of problematic substance use tend to be positive. The person may feel good, have more confidence, and forget about his or her problems temporarily. The problems caused by substance use might not be obvious for some time.

When the person uses substances to escape or change how he or she feels, using can become a habit, which can be hard to break. Continued substance use, especially heavy use, can cause changes in the body and brain. A person who develops physical dependence and then stops using may experience distressing symptoms of withdrawal. These changes may explain why people continue to crave the substance long after they have stopped using, and why they may slip back into patterns of problematic use.

### **How do I know if I need treatment?**

If you feel that substance use is causing problems in your life and that you are unable to control your use, contact an addiction counsellor for an assessment. This assessment gathers information about your use and related problems and other factors in your life, such as your personal strengths and supports. This information will help you and your counsellor decide whether you might benefit from treatment or other support.

**The Peace River Outpatient Addictions Team welcomes anyone who is concerned about their own use, or someone else's use, of substances or gambling to contact the main Addiction and Mental Health office (phone 780-624-6151) to talk to one of our counsellors: Sue, Trevor or Karissa.**