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Calgary and Area

NEWS RELEASE

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Disrupting the domino effect of substance misuse

Symposium brings local experts together to further the community response to the opioid crisis

Today, more than 140 local experts from across a range of sectors including government, health, law enforcement, and the social services, gathered to probe deeply into the impacts of substance misuse in our city and explore potential preventative initiatives that are complimentary to existing treatments.

Hosted by Alberta Health Services, Calgary Police Service, and United Way of Calgary and Area, the focus of the *Calgary Symposium on Substance Misuse* is to further build out a community response to address root causes of substance misuse and the opioid crisis.

“Bringing new lifesaving supports to families affected by substance use is a priority as we take action to address the devastating toll the opioid crisis is having in Calgary,” says Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health. “By opening new treatment spaces, supporting awareness campaigns and expanding supervised consumption services, we’re using a range of tools to keep people healthy. I’m proud to partner with Calgary Police, AHS, the United Way and community-based agencies as we work together to strengthen health care services and supports to help Calgarians struggling with substance use.”

“We know that factors such as poverty, unemployment, social isolation, domestic violence, and mental health issues increase an individual’s risk of substance misuse,” says Karen Young, President and Chief Executive Officer of United Way and Calgary Area. “Getting to the underlying causes, with a focus on prevention, is critical to disrupting the domino chain reaction that continues to gain momentum in our city.”

In 2017, 733 people died of accidental opioid overdose in Alberta. That’s the equivalent of two people every day. In the first quarter of 2018, the Calgary Zone (75) and Edmonton Zone (46) had the highest numbers of fentanyl deaths. The Calgary Zone continues to have the highest rate per 1,000 persons at 18.1.

“More people died as a result of an overdose in Calgary in 2017, than traffic fatalities and homicides combined,” says Chief Constable Roger Chaffin, Calgary Police Service. “We simply can’t arrest our way out of this problem. As police, our role is not to criminalize addiction, but to ensure vulnerable people are not being preyed on by those seeking to fund criminal activities. Calgarians need support to address the root causes of addiction, a complex social issue that cannot be solved in isolation.”

“Substance misuse touches everyone in our community,” says Julie Kerr, Senior Operating Officer, Alberta Health Services. “I commend the Government of Alberta for taking positive steps to help save lives by increasing treatment and harm reduction and numerous other strategies underway. We need to continue to work together to identify innovative, solution-focused initiatives.”



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The Symposium hosts recognize that the task before them is multi-faceted, involving multiple systems and partners. It won't be solved quickly.

"Today is just the beginning of bringing people together to solve a complex issue and mobilize action to create lasting change in ways that improve people's lives," says Young. "This is what United Way does. And the Symposium serves as the platform to do just that."

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