
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions
BC Centre on Substance Use

B.C. launches 24/7 helpline to help experts help people with addictions

VICTORIA – A new 24/7 helpline for clinicians will provide health-care providers around British Columbia with live, in-the-moment addiction medicine support, while they are treating patients.

The 24/7 Addiction Medicine Clinician Support Line was launched on Tuesday, June 16, 2020, by the BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU). The support line is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to provide rapid response for time-sensitive clinical substance-use inquiries. Addiction medicine experts provide telephone consultation to physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and pharmacists who are involved in addiction and substance-use care, treatment and recovery in British Columbia.

“Earlier this spring, we worked quickly to launch Canada’s first guidance for prescribing safe prescription alternatives to the poisoned and increasingly toxic drug supply in B.C.,” said Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “This helpline is another key step in supporting health-care professionals to meet the immediate needs of their patients and to keep them separated from dangerous, unpredictable street drugs.”

The 24/7 support line will connect health-care providers to an addiction medicine specialist who has expertise in addiction medicine, including emergency, acute and community care. Consultation can include support in screening, assessment, treatment and management of substance use and substance-use disorders.

This new resource will help support implementation of clinical guidance and improve access to evidence-based treatment for patients. The support is urgently needed as clinical guidance and regulatory amendments are being rapidly developed in response to the dual public health emergencies in response to overdoses and the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, telephone guidance can be provided to support patients with opioid-use disorder. Clinicians can also consider prescribing safer prescription alternatives to the toxic drug supply.

“Training in addiction medicine remains a huge gap in the health-care system and people aren't able to access the treatment and care they need as a result, despite the urgent need as we grapple with two public health emergencies that are especially impacting people who use drugs,” said Dr. Christy Sutherland, physician education lead at the BCCSU and medical director of PHS Community Services Society. “This new support line will be a great asset to clinicians in many settings – from an ER doctor working overnight to a nurse in a remote community – and help improve the delivery of life-saving, evidence-based addiction care across the province.”

Clinicians can reach the 24/7 Addiction Medicine Clinician Support Line and speak to an Addiction Medicine Specialist by calling 778 945-7619.

Quotes:

Emma Garrod, registered nurse, clinical nurse educator, Providence Health Care –

“My experience providing substance-use practice support to a variety of disciplines has emphasized to me how vastly improved care is when providers and patients have access to expert guidance. This type of support builds confidence and capacity, and I’m thrilled that nurses will also be able to use this service, from remote settings to hospitals, at any time of the day.”

Mona Kwong, community pharmacist and pharmacy advisor/director, addiction pharmacy fellowship program, BCCSU –

“Pharmacists are extenders of the health-care team and are accessible at all hours of a day, whether through a phone call or an in-person drop-in. The 24/7 support line will be an important tool for pharmacists in every community across B.C. This line will provide timely access to addiction specialists for clinical guidance to support patient care planning.”

Dr. Nel Wieman, acting deputy chief medical officer, First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) –

“B.C.’s First Nations people have been historically underserved and disproportionately affected by untreated substance use. The need for increased services and support for addiction medicine in our communities has never been greater, nor has the need for addictions clinical staff trained and supported to deliver that treatment and care.”

Zak Matieschyn, nurse practitioner, Interior Health –

“Providing addiction care in rural B.C. can be very isolating and management of complex patients with addictions can be especially challenging. Access to a 24/7 support line to addiction specialists will be a huge benefit to rural clinicians, and will help provide patients with the best possible care.”

Quick Facts:

- The 24/7 Addiction Medicine Clinician Support Line is available for physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and pharmacists caring for individuals with substance use concerns.
- Addiction medicine specialists can help with diagnostic clarification, medication recommendations and treatment planning.
- Consultation can include support in screening, assessment, treatment and management of substance use and substance use disorders.
- Support is available for a wide range of substance-use concerns, such as opioids, alcohol, stimulants and benzodiazepines.

Learn More:

24/7 Addiction Medicine Clinician Support Line: www.bccsu.ca/24-7

Guidance: Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Public Health Emergencies:

<https://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Risk-Mitigation-in-the-Context-of-Dual-Public-Health-Emergencies-v1.5.pdf>

COVID-19 resources for prescribers: www.bccsu.ca/covid-19

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