

# Pillars for Life – One Year Update

May 2021

The tragic loss of a person by suicide is felt by family and friends, and the entire community. *Pillars for Life: The Saskatchewan Suicide Prevention Plan* is the Government of Saskatchewan's plan to address and prevent suicide.

This plan is a starting point for Saskatchewan that will be built upon by government and its partners in improving and delivering suicide prevention programming in the province.

Work on the plan is underway, though implementation has been affected by the need for comprehensive COVID-19 health system response.

## Key Updates:

*Record Investment:* In 2020-21, the Government of Saskatchewan invested a record high total of \$435 million for mental health and addiction services and supports, including \$1.2 million to support suicide prevention. These funds have supported work that was initiated previously and is continuing, including:

- community led Roots of Hope Suicide Prevention initiatives in northern Saskatchewan;
- Mental Health Capacity Building initiative in five Saskatchewan schools as recommended by Saskatchewan's Advocate for Children and Youth;
- capital improvements in Saskatchewan Health Authority facilities to reduce suicide risk;
- public awareness campaigns; and
- work to address the Provincial Auditor's recommendations regarding treating patients at high risk of suicide in the northwest.

*Supporting Initiatives:* The Ministry of Health funds the following work connected to suicide prevention:

- The Mental Health Commission of Canada's Roots of Hope project is a community-led suicide prevention initiative grounded in the knowledge and experience of local community leaders to develop, build on, and implement sustainable, culturally appropriate components.
  - Saskatchewan is the only jurisdiction across Canada to fund the initiative in three communities: La Ronge, Meadow Lake, and Buffalo Narrows.
  - Annually, \$750,000 is allocated to the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA); \$250,000 for each site.

- The Mental Health Capacity Building initiative was launched in five schools located in four communities: Sandy Bay, North Battleford, Regina and Balgonie.
  - In 2020-21, \$1.2 million was provided to the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) for the funding of this program. This funding is also being provided in 2021-22.
- Support was provided to the University of Saskatchewan to build a post-secondary suicide prevention framework that can be shared and replicated in other Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions.
- The University of Regina’s Internet-Based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (ICBT) program provides support to people for a variety of concerns, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, alcohol misuse, and chronic conditions.
  - Since its inception in 2015, the Government of Saskatchewan has invested \$4.83 million into the ICBT program.

*Supporting Crisis Interventions:* Recent provincial investments and program implementations have supported access to mental health and addictions services and suicide prevention. These initiatives include:

- **Community Recovery Teams.** Multidisciplinary teams to support people with chronic and persistent mental health challenges in the community.
- **Police and Crisis Teams (PACT)** pair a police officer with a mental health worker to attend calls that include people who may be experiencing a mental health or addictions crisis.
  - PACT teams are now located in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Moose Jaw and Yorkton and a rural PACT pilot is being established in partnership with the RCMP.
  - The 2021-22 Budget includes \$240,000 to add an additional PACT team in Estevan.
- Support is provided for crisis services for people thinking about or affected by suicide, including HealthLine 811, Kids Help Phone, Mobile Crisis, the federally funded Hope for Wellness chat line and PACT.
- Mental Health First Aid training has occurred throughout the province, through funding of \$809,000 since 2015-16. Staff from the SHA and/or community partners are trained as facilitators to deliver MHFA courses to health and other human service colleagues.
- Walk-in counselling is available in 23 communities in partnership with Family Services Saskatchewan.

*Supporting First Nations: Pillars for Life* calls for engagement with First Nations leadership as work progresses, and includes the learnings and perspectives from the FSIN suicide prevention strategy.

- A triparty Letter of Commitment (LoC) to Address First Nations Suicide Prevention was signed by the Government of Saskatchewan, Indigenous Services Canada, and the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations on September 24, 2020.
- Several meetings were held in 2020-21 and continue in 2021-22 which set the foundation for ongoing collaboration and partnership.

*Responding to the Provincial Auditor:* In 2019, the Provincial Auditor released a report including a review on the use of suicide prevention protocols in Northwest Saskatchewan. The report contained recommendations for the SHA. In 2020-21, the Ministry provided \$200,000 to the SHA to undertake this work.

The provincial suicide prevention protocols provide a standard for mental health professionals in outpatient and inpatient mental health and addictions services in the SHA. This is to ensure that people with suicidal risk are effectively screened, assessed, have a safety plan, management plan, follow-up plan including reassessment, and a communication plan, with file documentation to keep them safe and to maximize their functioning.

## **Looking Forward:**

The Ministry of Health continues to expand mental health and addictions supports and services by investing a total of \$458 million in 2021-22, a 5.4 per cent increase over last year and the largest budget in our province's history. This includes \$1 million in targeted funding for new suicide prevention initiatives.

These significant investments will assist individuals struggling with mental wellness and addictions issues with key investments in mobile harm reduction services, integrated youth services, more addiction treatment beds in Estevan and further support for *Pillars for Life: The Saskatchewan Suicide Prevention Plan*.

The Government of Saskatchewan will continue to consult with our partners and key stakeholders as we move forward with implementing *Pillars for Life* and improving suicide prevention supports throughout the province.