

# Pillars for Life – Four Year Update

May 2024

The tragic loss of a person to suicide is one person too many. *Pillars for Life: The Saskatchewan Suicide Prevention Plan* is the Government of Saskatchewan’s plan to address and prevent suicide.

This plan guides Saskatchewan’s activities in this area. Government and its partners are building on it to improve delivery of suicide prevention programs across the province.

## Key Updates in Year Four:

*Record Investment:* In 2023-24, the Government of Saskatchewan invested record funding for mental health and addiction services and supports, including \$2.25 million to support suicide prevention. These funds support ongoing work and actions that were previously initiated, including:

- The community-led Roots of Hope Suicide Prevention initiatives in northern Saskatchewan.
- Work to address the Provincial Auditor’s recommendations regarding treating patients at high risk of suicide in the northwest.
- A provincial safe medication disposal program, delivered by the Pharmacy Association of Saskatchewan, to reduce the risk of suicide from unused or expired medication.
- A province-wide public awareness campaign, with promotion of the national Suicide Crisis Helpline, 9-8-8, launched in November 2023.
- Training for members of the media on informed mental health reporting.

*Supporting Initiatives:* The Ministry of Health funded 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 in Canada to fund the initiative in three communities: La Ronge, Meadow Lake, and Buffalo Narrows. Annually, funding is allocated to the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) to support Roots of Hope.
- *Supporting First Nations:* *Pillars for Life* calls for engagement with First Nations leadership as work progresses and includes the learnings and perspectives from the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) suicide prevention strategy.

- The Government of Saskatchewan continued funding for the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations of \$500,000 in 2023-24 to support two mental wellness on-the-land camps for urban First Nations youth and has supported the development and training of peer supports targeted toward suicide prevention. These initiatives align with the Joint Letter of Commitment signed by the province, the Government of Canada and FSIN in 2020, where the parties agreed to address suicide prevention among the First Nations population. Work continues with these partners regarding initiatives for 2024-25.

*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 Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA). In 2023-24, the Ministry of Health provided \$150,000 to the SHA to support their work implementing these recommendations.

Supported updates to the **provincial suicide prevention protocols**, which 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.

*In Addition to Pillars for Life:* Continued provincial investments and program implementations have supported access to mental health and addictions services and suicide prevention. Some of these initiatives include:

- **Mental Health Capacity Building**, a program that supports positive mental wellness in students, expanded to five additional schools, bringing the number of schools taking part in the program to 15. Under the province's new Action Plan for Mental Health and Addictions, the government has committed to expanding the program to all 27 school divisions by 2028.
- **Expansion of Rapid Access Counselling through Family Service Saskatchewan** to include children and youth in many communities across Saskatchewan.
- **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 located in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Moose Jaw, Yorkton and Estevan.
- **Community Recovery Teams.** Multidisciplinary teams to support people with chronic and persistent mental health challenges in the community.
- Crisis services are available for people thinking about or affected by suicide, including HealthLine 811, Kids Help Phone, Mobile Crisis, and PACT.
  - The new federally funded **9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline** helps people who are thinking about suicide or concerned about someone they know. Calls or texts are directed to a mental health crisis or suicide prevention service, free of charge.