



TAKING
COMPREHENSIVE
ACTION

ALL OF THE INFORMATION, advice and ideas the Task Force heard and learned during our consultations have helped guide our recommendations and our determination to fight back against crystal meth.

Our recommendations are comprehensive and reflect the three key themes identified through our consultations. It will come as no surprise to those involved in addressing this issue that there are no quick and easy solutions. The problem can't be solved just by treating those who are addicted to crystal meth or putting more drug dealers in jail. It's going to take a combination of those actions plus a strong emphasis on prevention, active involvement of community members and industry leaders, better coordination of services, more research, and most of all, a determined commitment by all Albertans to fight back and completely eliminate the growing problems caused by crystal meth.

Our recommendations are grouped into the following categories:

- ❑ TAKING A PROVINCE-WIDE APPROACH
- ❑ PREVENTION
- ❑ HEALING AND TREATMENT
- ❑ GETTING TOUGH
- ❑ SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES
- ❑ IMPROVING SERVICES AND ASSESSING RESULTS

TAKING A PROVINCE-WIDE APPROACH

The Task Force believes that a province-wide approach is required, supported by a targeted pool of funds and with clear accountability for how those funds are allocated and the results they achieve. It's only through a province-wide commitment that we can engage Albertans in the fight against crystal meth and achieve positive results in every part of the province.

COMBINED FUNDING FOR CRYSTAL METH COMMITMENTS

1. The Government of Alberta should create a fund that pools resources for the development of programs to reduce and eliminate the use and abuse of crystal meth. The fund would be accessed by communities, police, service providers and others, and distributed by the implementation team.

Many different government departments must assume a leadership role on the issue of crystal meth, and many more community service providers, service groups, agencies and institutions can directly contribute to the solutions. As the various government departments, groups and agencies seek funding to support the prevention and healing efforts outlined in this report, the Task Force wants to ensure that all funding is efficiently and effectively allocated and directed to priority areas and solutions. Creating a pool of funds, overseen by an implementation team, is similar to the Student Health Initiative Partnership (SHIP) funding model. This pool of funding will help to eliminate the silos that can often occur within government and elsewhere when funding is available within a single department or agency. We expect that the model will encourage active partnerships and creative, solutions-driven thinking.

CRYSTAL METH TASK FORCE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

2. The Government of Alberta should establish an implementation team to provide advice, direction and control of the fund and ensure timely implementation of the recommendations contained within this report.

While the mandate for the Task Force ends with this report, the work must continue so there is a strong voice for the issues and to make sure the recommendations outlined in this report are implemented on a timely basis. The implementation team can act as an ongoing advocate for action on the crystal meth issue. Most importantly, the team will be tasked with oversight and management of the fund created in Recommendation 1.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ACTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The Auditor General of Alberta should review the performance and actions of government departments, agencies and the implementation team in addressing the crystal meth problem.

Alberta's Auditor General provides tremendous oversight and scrutiny of all government related activities and departments, ensuring the most effective and efficient use of taxpayer's funds. The Auditor General's office should focus on the performance of the provincial government, related agencies and the implementation team relating to the issue of crystal meth and the implementation of the recommendations in this report. As a result, Alberta's young people, families, addictions workers, police officers and others can be assured that action on this issue will certainly occur.

PREVENTION

As noted earlier in our report, prevention holds the best hope for the future. The emphasis on prevention is at the core of our recommendations because it's the only way we can build long-term solutions to address not only the problem with crystal meth today but to prepare us and our children and youth for the next big synthetic drug of the future. It's an ongoing battle and we need to arm our children and youth with the skills to fight back and win.

DRUG EDUCATION

4. Prevention programs should be developed and implemented in all urban and rural communities through partnerships with not-for-profit organizations, municipalities, Regional Health Authorities, school jurisdictions and agencies such as AADAC.

To be truly effective in the fight against crystal meth, preventative education efforts must occur in every community. AADAC is active in many Alberta communities, while the Regional Health Authorities have the infrastructure and opportunity to reach nearly every Albertan at some point in their life. Municipalities and school jurisdictions should also be involved. All programs delivered by these organizations and agencies should be evaluated to assess their effectiveness and ensure accountability for the funds used. In partnership with communities across Alberta, these groups could launch a very effective preventative strike against meth and other drugs in our province.

INCREASED HEALTH CARE SERVICE CAPACITY

5. Regional Health Authorities should be funded to increase walk-in capacity for prevention support, addictions services, and mental health counseling and ensure that it is more accessible to youth and young adults..

Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) have operations in nearly every community in Alberta. The youth we spoke to said they needed more outlets and places to turn when they were in need of help or support. Urban and rural RHAs must reposition their existing infrastructure and resources or create new facilities to effectively deliver treatment and support for youth and street youth who are ready to seek support and create a drug-free life.

SAFE AND CARING SCHOOLS

6. Alberta Education should develop appropriate curriculum and resources to support school jurisdictions in fulfilling their responsibility to ensure that all schools are safe and caring places for children.

A safe and caring school environment should be one that is free of drugs and any other addictive substance. The Task Force encourages Alberta Education to continue to support the objective of making our schools and learning centres safe and caring places, where our children can learn, grow and be free of the pressures and dangers of crystal meth and other drugs.

ENHANCING THE CAREER AND LIFE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

7. School jurisdictions should enhance the delivery of the drug education component of the Career and Life Management (CALM) program by including guest speakers who are experienced with meth and other drugs such as former users, other youth, law enforcement, those involved with youth theatre, health providers and others. Parents should also be encouraged to join in a school-based CALM session on drugs.

The CALM program is the required course for all grade 11 students. It focuses on career and life skills that students will need throughout their lives. The CALM program is one of the few curriculum-based ways in which Alberta's students are educated about drugs. The Task Force has witnessed the value of learning from people experienced with drugs. Youth have indicated that when the message is delivered from someone experienced with meth and drugs, it is more believable, credible and powerful as a preventative measure. By enhancing the CALM curriculum with this real-world perspective, we can broaden our youth's education and hopefully their perspective on drugs.

RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

8. Alberta Children's Services, Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs and Community Development should work in partnership with municipalities and the private sector to provide accessible and affordable recreational and cultural opportunities for youth in their communities.

The Task Force learned from Dr. Fraser Mustard, an early childhood development expert, that if we provide a child with at least one recreational opportunity, we can effectively reduce the possibility of their future drug use by up to 80 per cent. In communities like Hinton and Drayton Valley, where meth's impact hit hard, we heard a similar message. Creating and engaging youth in recreational opportunities was central to their success in reducing the onslaught of crystal meth in their communities. We need to create places for youth to go – skate parks, Boys and Girls clubs, basketball courts, art classes and music sessions. These activities can take place in brand new facilities or in existing locations such as gymnasiums and community centres. With these opportunities in place, boredom among youth can be replaced with positive educational and social activities and we can reduce the window of opportunity for drugs in a child's life.

WEBSITE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

9. AADAC should use Internet sites that are popular with youth and young adults to share drug information and provide prevention messages.

The Task Force heard that youth are learning about, and often gaining access to drugs, through popular Internet sites. AADAC needs to capitalize on these already highly frequented sites as a part of its overall education strategy for youth, by infiltrating these sites as a user and sending accurate and factual drug information to counteract much of the misinformation that exists through current messaging.

IDENTIFYING AT-RISK CHILDREN

10. Alberta Children's Services, Alberta Education and Alberta Health and Wellness, in partnership with Alberta school boards and school superintendents, day care providers, and preschools, should develop a protocol to identify at-risk children, beginning at an early age (zero to six years), to increase their resiliency, and reduce risk for drug use and abuse.

Healthy development in the early years of life has a major effect on a person's physical and mental health and behaviors in later life. By building strong developmental assets in children and giving them the skills, values and self-esteem to guide their physical, mental and emotional growth, we can help build strong, capable and healthy youth and young adults. In doing so, we protect children against the dangers and pressures, including drug-related dangers, that they will encounter as they grow older. At-risk children require extra care and attention at an early age, and our health care and school systems need to collaborate in an effort to effectively identify these students when they first enter the school system, or sooner. Working in conjunction with existing programs such as Parent Link and Early Childhood Development Centers, partners can work with at-risk families and children to introduce measures and behaviors that are critical in the prevention of addictions later in life.

11. Regional Health Authorities should establish a clear role for community public health nurses and other health professionals in identifying, working with, and supporting at-risk families.

Public health nurses are well accepted in the community. They visit new moms when they return home with a newborn and connect with families through the early years of a child's life. These nurses and other health professionals such as pharmacists and physicians need to take responsibility for identifying and supporting at-risk families. These frontline health care workers can be our first line of defense in identifying those most in need. They also have the ability to deliver a prevention message to every family and child they work with on an ongoing basis.

SCHOOL ADDICTION COUNSELORS

12. The Government of Alberta should provide ongoing funding to Health and Wellness for the development of partnerships with AADAC, Regional Health Authorities (mental health), and school boards to enhance access to addictions counselors in all junior and senior high schools in Alberta.

Providing students with greater access to drug education and counseling is a high priority of this Task Force. We must provide all students with access to counselors who understand the pressures young people are facing, particularly if they are involved with drugs and addictions. If students are expected to respond to our support and guidance, they need to feel that drug information and the opportunity for dialogue are readily available. Improved access to social workers, addictions counselors and clinical psychologists in junior and senior high schools will provide youth with the supportive and preventative environment that this Task Force envisions.

PARTICIPATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS AND EDUCATORS

13. Alberta Education should work with school boards and provide the necessary support and resources to ensure that schools and school jurisdictions have up-to-date information and effective policies on crystal meth and other substances.

Our schools need to have the most up-to-date information, support and resources available on drugs and the pressures that are impacting our youth and young adults. Alberta Education needs to ensure that our schools have the capacity to stay current, so that schools and teachers can provide the support, education and information required by students today.

14. Alberta Education should continue to support the involvement of school jurisdictions as members of community drug task forces and community drug prevention initiatives to address drug abuse and other youth issues.

Community drug task forces are critical prevention measures in many Alberta communities because of the strong collection of leaders and partners involved. Our Task Force witnessed the value of having teachers and school officials involved in community drug task forces. Educators are able to build a strong connection back to the youth, ensure the work is focused on education, and help build the capacity within our schools to better support their students. In the past, school jurisdictions and schools have been left to independently manage and support drug task force volunteer involvement. We believe Alberta Education must encourage and support this participation for the betterment of our education system, our communities and the lives of our young people.

MENTORSHIP FOR ALL CHILDREN

15. The Government of Alberta, in partnership with communities, should support existing mentorship programs to help develop strong and positive skills in our youth.

Many of the child development experts with whom the Task Force consulted, highlighted the need for all children to have a positive, safe, adult influence and mentor in their lives. When children feel there is a caring adult watching out for them, they tend to make more positive choices and decisions. There are many existing mentorship programs that do a commendable job of working with youth at risk. These programs and others need to be encouraged and recognized for the preventative role they play in discouraging the use and abuse of crystal meth and other drugs. Steps also need to be taken to provide information and support to families, caregivers, foster parents, and caregivers in group homes.

16. The Government of Alberta, in partnership with communities, should develop a mentorship program for drug-endangered children.

The Task Force had the opportunity to learn from Dr. Kitti Freier, a leading expert in child drug endangerment. Dr. Freier praised Alberta's recent efforts to protect drug-endangered children from their abusive homes, but challenged our province to not just think about these children in their moment of vulnerability, but also to look ahead and create a path where they are supported and can become resilient citizens in the future. She suggested that our communities step up and redirect these children from a negative life path to a positive one. While there are many ways to make this happen, one highly effective method is to begin building human connections to these high-risk children. To truly foster prevention, our communities need to monitor these children, support them, and build relationships through adult mentorship programs to help these children see that they can have a different life.

17. AADAC should enhance treatment protocols to encourage mentoring programs with coaches and sponsors which support drug users through the entire treatment and after care process.

AADAC has effectively used mentorship in their addictions counseling and treatment for some time. By mentoring youth and adults with drug addictions, directly with counseling staff and indirectly through the use of outside support groups like Nicotine Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous, mentorship has been critical to the treatment and after care process. This work must be continued and enhanced, particularly for youth and adults without a supportive network of family and friends.

OUTREACH SUPPORT FOR STREET YOUTH

18. Alberta Health and Wellness, through AADAC and in partnership with industry and non-profit outreach service agencies, should increase the number of mobile workers to support high-risk street youth in need.

Street youth addicted to drugs are a difficult but important population to reach. Many of the young people that live on the street have serious mental and physical health issues that are concurrent with their drug addictions. Just because these youth may live on the margins of society does not mean that our society should not support them. These youth and young adults have difficulty accessing services because of limited transportation and the stigma they face in approaching recognized health care and addictions treatment institutions. We need to be more effective in reaching out to them with increased services and support that are accessible and flexible to meet their treatment and health needs while they're on the street.

SOCIAL MARKETING AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

19. Alberta Health and Wellness, through AADAC, should lead the development of a social marketing campaign, in partnership with industry, community and government, to discourage crystal meth use across Alberta.

While there is a difference of opinion on what type of campaign delivers the most effective impact and results in changes in behaviour, there was strong consensus among all stakeholders on the need for an awareness campaign on crystal meth. While youth must be the primary audience for this awareness campaign, parents, adults, employees, Aboriginal people and the gay/lesbian community are all secondary audiences. The campaign should include a range of marketing tactics from advertising to public relations to ensure the broadest dissemination and credibility of the messages. It is also critical to ensure the campaign reflects the input and ideas of youth and targets youth in both urban and rural centres.

EMPLOYEE DRUG EDUCATION AND TRAINING

20. Alberta Advanced Education should work with post-secondary institutions to provide drug and addictions education to people taking upgrading, additional training, and professional development programs.

Industry stakeholders expressed the overwhelming need for employee education on drugs and addictions. While a great deal of this education is left to individual organizations, many industries and professions require their employees to continually upgrade their skills or obtain further training at one of Alberta's post secondary institutions. The Task Force wants to see drug and addictions training included in all professional development upgrading and training sessions, at post-secondary institutions. Additionally, where possible, peer education with recovered addicts and those experienced with meth and other drugs should be included to highlight the safety, productivity and personal reasons why drugs have no place in the workplace.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN DRUG EDUCATION AND SUPPORTS

21. Alberta Human Resources and Employment should require all Alberta employers, through their workplace safety policies, to adopt a drug and alcohol policy that fosters drug-free Alberta workplaces and worksites. They should also encourage employers to support drug education and prevention programs and employee self-referral programs for addictions treatment.

Alberta employers should have workplace drug policies that emphasize education, prevention and the maintenance of meth and drug-free work sites. Alberta Human Resources and Employment can encourage and support companies in the development of these policies by helping organizations send a clear message to employees that drugs will not be tolerated in the workplace. The motivation for employers is a more productive workforce and improved employee retention. Additionally, Human Resources and Employment can give guidance to organizations that want to build stronger and more supportive education and benefit models for their employees, including an employee self-referral program to encourage treatment and healing for employees who have drug addictions.

MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES AGAINST DRUGS

22. The Government of Alberta should encourage all communities to make the issue of meth and drug prevention a priority and to share best practices, knowledge and resources with one another.

Because many communities, most notably Drayton Valley and Camrose, have mounted an attack against meth, there are already best practices, tested resources, and a great deal of knowledge to be shared. Preventing the use of meth and other drugs must be a community issue. The Task Force wants all communities to make drug prevention a priority by coming together to learn from one another and launch a prevention effort against meth and other drugs before they strike. Our communities can best be organized and supported through local drug task forces and drug strategies.

SUPPORT FOR MUNICIPAL DRUG PREVENTION AND COORDINATION

23. The Government of Alberta should increase funding for municipalities to enhance community drug prevention, coordination and awareness programming.

When meth and other dangerous drugs strike at the heart of a community, the coordination and cost of the fight is often left up to the community and municipality, and those costs can come at the expense of other community priorities and initiatives. Municipalities need increased funding strictly for the purpose of community drug prevention and drug awareness. Their annual budgets should outline how this money will be spent. For example, this funding could help support a municipally-based coordinator to organize community drug prevention efforts (as was the case in Camrose) or it could support increased enforcement efforts, freeing up resources for other community priorities (as we heard in Hinton). Most importantly, the funding must support the creation of community partnerships. Stakeholders need to work together so that AADAC, regional health authorities, local drug task forces, schools and school jurisdictions, and others join the municipality in an effort to prevent crystal meth abuse in their communities.

24. Alberta Health and Wellness should establish a team of community, agency, public and private sector stakeholders to develop, deliver, and promote a web-based community mobilization tool kit for use in initiating a charge against drugs in communities.

The community mobilization tool kit should reflect all of the lessons, best practices and resources currently available in Alberta to help communities launch a preventative campaign against drugs. This tool kit must be a living, web-based kit that is easily accessible to communities and the public and that addresses the continuum of services and needs required by each community - from prevention to aftercare, from education to interagency and partner coordination. The tool kit could include education and awareness materials aimed at different audiences, best practices learned from communities who have been through the meth challenge, social marketing campaign materials, a listing of grants available to support further community prevention efforts, a directory of available detox, treatment and aftercare resources, human resource services available to local businesses and other useful supports and services. The Task Force understands that this tool kit cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution. It is not about creating a “canned” program for use by communities. It’s about creating the means for each community to launch its own preventative strike against meth and other drugs.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND EDUCATION

25. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should expand existing resources to provide additional law enforcement officers to deliver components of the curriculum-based drug education program from K – 12.

Experts in education and law enforcement, along with youth themselves, agree that there is significant value in involving law enforcement with the delivery of K-12 curriculum-based education programs. Police officers can most effectively address issues relating to drugs, gang participation and bullying. While nearly every police agency in Alberta is participating in a school drug education program, more officers need to be involved to provide a stronger, more consistent presence in schools. Rural, isolated and Aboriginal communities must also receive the benefit of having a positive, regular law enforcement presence in the school.

DEMAND REDUCTION

26. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should increase the number of demand reduction officers by 12 to work across the province with communities and local drug task forces on prevention issues and initiatives.

The demand reduction officers would not be focused on school education, but would instead help mobilize community drug prevention efforts. Demand officers could, for example, focus on a community’s implementation of the drug-endangered children legislation, initiate community drug awareness and prevention mobilization, support industry education, and play other important roles to reduce the interest in and demand for meth and other drugs.

HEALING AND TREATMENT

The Task Force consistently heard there simply are not enough resources, facilities, trained people, and support for individuals and their families when they're faced with serious problems with addictions. Alberta can and must do better. No child, youth, adult or family member should be denied access to treatment when they need it because there isn't room or they can't afford it. This problem must be addressed and addressed on an urgent basis.

DETOXIFICATION

27. Alberta Health and Wellness should provide the necessary resources to add a minimum of 100 beds for detoxification services in urban and rural communities across Alberta.

Across the province, there is a critical shortage of detox beds, providing a safe place where drug users can go to get off of drugs for a period of five to 10 days. Additional detox facilities must be located in both major and smaller centers where they are required. There is an urgent need for detox beds both in and outside Edmonton and Calgary. The Task Force also heard about the need for detox facilities in communities such as St. Paul, High Level, Medicine Hat, Drayton Valley, Wetaskiwin, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, and other remote areas. The additional detox facilities should have the capacity to serve adults, youth and Aboriginal people, support a wide range of service providers, and ensure a continuum of care for users. Because there is a chronic shortage of beds, health professionals working in emergency rooms, outreach workers, police, parents and families, parole officers and corrections officers struggle with where to place drug users when they require detox.

TREATMENT AND SUPPORT

28. Alberta Health and Wellness should provide the necessary resources to add a minimum of 200 beds for treatment services in urban and rural communities across Alberta.

The number of treatment beds is not keeping up with the growing demand and the result is a critical shortage. Additional treatment beds are required to accommodate the increased volume of clients, to allow for longer stays required by meth users, and to provide beds specifically for young adults aged 18 to 29. Treatment facilities must be located in both major and smaller centres where there is demand and should serve children, youth, young adults, adults and Aboriginal people.

29. Alberta Health and Wellness should provide sufficient resources to establish young adult (ages 18 to 24) residential treatment programs to address this growing population and their unique addiction needs.

The young adult population is a difficult population to serve since they don't fit in with the over-30 year old crowd, nor do they mesh with children and youth under the age of 18. The Task Force heard this from young people themselves as well as service providers. In addition to addictions treatment, these young people may require education upgrading, life skills and career planning as part of their treatment and support process.

HEALTH CARE INTERVENTION WITH THOSE MOST AT RISK

30. Regional Health Authorities should establish an intervention role for all health care professionals who deal with at-risk individuals and families.

Health care professionals are in a unique position to have access to a large percentage of the population. Nurses who monitor new mothers and babies are able to identify at-risk individuals and to work closely with them. Trained health professionals who can identify meth users and are aware of where to turn for support may be able to intervene early and offer help to a meth user, rather than waiting for a problem or incident to arise.

SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS ON STUDENTS AND DRUGS

31. Alberta Education, in partnership with school boards and AADAC, should establish a provincial protocol requiring all youth caught with drugs in schools or under the influence of drugs to see an AADAC addictions counselor and attend AADAC information sessions.

The Task Force believes the best place to prevent and stop children and youth from getting involved with drugs is in school. Often, students who get caught with drugs in school the first time are suspended for up to five days and the second time, they are expelled. Expulsion results in students being transferred to another school to continue their education. This simply transfers the problem into someone else's hands. Requiring that students receive help to address their addiction is a critical step in ensuring these students remain in school. Counseling will assist students in addressing the root of their addiction and provide the necessary and ongoing support to treat the addiction. Parents of students using meth should also be encouraged to attend the counseling sessions.

FAMILY COUNSELING AND SUPPORT

32. Alberta Health and Wellness should enhance AADAC's efforts with families and parents to include community prevention initiatives and education and support activities.

AADAC is an excellent source of information and expertise on addictions. They can provide a wealth of valuable information from the indicators of someone using drugs to where a person can go for help. Parents and family members often feel helpless and uncertain of how best to help. They need access to information and support to help them cope with their loved one's addiction. AADAC requires additional resources to increase their support for parents and families as well as their support for first responders (i.e. police and emergency services) by providing them with the resources and understanding they need to deal with parents and families in crisis due to an addiction.

24-HOUR PHONE SUPPORT AND INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES IN NEED

33. Alberta Health and Wellness, working with the Regional Health Authorities and AADAC, should enhance the Health Link Line to provide 24-hour drug information and support to those in need.

AADAC currently provides counseling services to children, youth, young adults, parents, teachers and other service providers, yet still more can be done. Parents and families often reach a crisis with a user after business hours and need immediate access to information and support. Youth who are former drug users acknowledge that their parents and family members needed help to understand what was going on with them, how to help them, and how to cope. Often, parents feel they have nowhere to turn. A 24-hour support line, that is well-promoted in the community, would be a tremendous resource to parents and families.

CORRECTIONS ADDICTIONS COUNSELING

34. Alberta Health and Wellness should provide support for addictions counselors in provincial correctional facilities to ensure that all inmates with addictions receive addictions and mental health counseling and support while incarcerated and as a condition of their release.

The Task Force believes there should be zero tolerance for drugs within correctional facilities. Often crimes committed by drug users are related to their drug use. It seems only reasonable that inmates who have an addiction should receive addictions and mental health support while incarcerated and as a condition of their release to prevent further criminal behavior. Because people in jail can't be compelled to take these programs, judges should be encouraged to order this type of counseling as part of the sentence.

AFTER CARE

35. Alberta Health and Wellness should partner with treatment centers and the non-profit sector to deliver a 50% increase in the number of after care facilities.

After care is a critical component in the treatment cycle. In fact, some people argue that it is the most important step. After care provides a safe environment for those coming out of treatment to receive the necessary life skills training and transitional supports as they take steps to re-enter their community. These facilities must be located in both major and smaller centers and must support children, youth, young adults, adults and Aboriginal people. Additionally, all treatment centers must be required to develop and implement an after care plan with each client before their release. There may be potential to add on to existing facilities to increase after care services, but there clearly is a need for new facilities, particularly in rural areas.

GETTING TOUGH

A clear and consistent focus on prevention and better access to detox, treatment, after care and support are absolutely essential. But it's not enough. We have to get crystal meth off our streets and get tough on drug dealers and the people who manufacture crystal meth. We have to get tough in our policing, in the legal system, and in our courts. And we need to send a clear signal that Alberta won't stand by and let drugs take over our society and ruin the lives of more and more young people.

DRUG UNDERCOVER STREET TEAMS (DUST)

36. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should establish Drug Undercover Street Teams (DUST) in seven regions in the province to address the impact of methamphetamine and drugs in urban, rural and Aboriginal communities.

Existing law enforcement efforts are not sufficient to produce the dramatic results necessary to make a significant difference in the current drug supply in Alberta. DUST teams would work undercover, on a regional basis, to dismantle and disrupt those controlling the illicit drug trade. Currently, there is little or no capacity for this type of specialized work in most of the province. DUST teams and the investigative teams supporting them would conduct operations aimed at dismantling the criminal networks involved in drug distribution and investigate the ancillary crime associated with drugs.

DRUG INTERDICTION TEAMS

37. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security, along with the federal government, should expand the "Jetway", Ports of Entry and highway interdiction program.

Enforcement and interdiction on provincial highways, at bus depots, train stations and airports, has proven to be a positive means of stopping what are known to be major drug transportation routes. This program targets transportation systems that are commonly used for transporting drugs. It has had significant success in the Calgary area since 1999, and needs to extend to other parts of the province as well.

POLICE CANINE PROGRAMS

38. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should expand the canine program and ensure it includes dedicated time for regular school visits throughout the province, to interact with, and educate our youth.

Canine teams are an important asset in the community with a solid track record of effectiveness in searching and locating drugs and acting as a deterrent to individuals who might otherwise challenge police. Drug dogs have been used in various education programs and have proven useful in breaking down barriers between children and the police, allowing for more effective reception of the message.

ANALYTICAL SUPPORT TO DRUG INTELLIGENCE TEAMS

39. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should increase support for analytical resources to drug intelligence teams.

Coordination of drug and gang investigations is more effective when it is supported by timely and robust intelligence. While a refocusing of existing operational intelligence members is part of the solution, an increase in analytical resources is required to provide the proper assessment of raw information to prosecute drug crimes. This ongoing support would also lead to greater technical expertise to meet the increasing sophistication and technology used by criminal networks.

OUTSTANDING WARRANTS

40. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should establish dedicated, integrated, province-wide teams to focus on gang and organized crime members with outstanding warrants for their arrest.

Many of the gang or organized crime members who control the drug distribution networks at all levels have outstanding warrants for their arrest. Of the over 132,000 current outstanding criminal warrants in Alberta, approximately 7,400 are for crimes of violence or significant drug offences.

DRUG ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITIES

41. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should add to the General Investigative Section (GIS) capacity across all police forces, ensuring officers are located in smaller and larger centers across Alberta to investigate and coordinate drug investigations and prepare operational plans for undercover operations.

In nearly every community we visited or heard from, the need for greater General Investigative Section (GIS) officers was a recurring theme. In Drayton Valley, adding increased GIS support to their local detachment was an important part of their fight against meth. This increased capacity, and the resulting province-wide ability for officers to share intelligence between communities, will be key in the prevention of meth and other synthetic drugs in Alberta.

TACTICAL SUPPORT FOR DRUG INVESTIGATIONS AND OUR COMMUNITIES

42. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should create full-time Emergency Response Teams/Tactical Teams in Edmonton, Red Deer and Calgary to serve and protect the province and support entries on all drug search warrants.

Given the increasing level of violence and danger associated with drug trafficking and production, high-level tactical support is needed for drug search warrants and interdiction. By moving the Emergency Response Teams (ERT) located in Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer from part time to full time, they will be more able and available to support drug investigations and community safety in all parts of Alberta, on a moment's notice.

DRUG PARAPHERNALIA AND DRUG TESTING AVERSION BUSINESSES

43. Municipal governments should neither permit nor renew licenses to businesses that sell criminal drug paraphernalia and/or sell equipment to avoid positive drug testing.

The sale of criminal drug paraphernalia sends conflicting messages to our youth. Many youth told us they receive mixed messages when they are told drugs are bad, yet everything they need to do drugs is sold at the local mall. By permitting these businesses to actively sell criminal drug paraphernalia, we defeat the preventative message reinforced by parents, schools, law enforcement and the broader community. Our community must send consistent messages on our intolerance for drugs and drug use by discouraging or prohibiting the establishment of stores or businesses that sell products for drug use and/or equipment to help users avoid positive drug detection.

PRECURSOR CONTROL

44. Alberta Health and Wellness should place drug products containing ephedrine as a single active ingredient in Schedule 2 and those containing either pseudoephedrine or ephedrine in combination with other active ingredients in Schedule 3 of the Scheduled Drugs Regulation.

Ephedrine is an active ingredient used in the production of crystal meth. By making these changes to the Scheduled Drugs Regulation, drugs with ephedrine would be sold only in pharmacies and they would be kept behind the counter.

RURAL-BASED PRECURSOR EDUCATION AND THEFT CONTROL

45. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, in partnership with local communities and Agriculture Service Boards, should provide educational materials for producers and ranchers on how to securely store precursor chemicals and fuels on their property and establish a network to monitor chemic thefts from farm operations.

In our view, the primary agriculture industry is largely unaware that many of the chemicals and fuels used and stored on farms and agriculture properties are being stolen and used as precursor chemicals for crystal meth production. On farms, these chemicals and fuels are often not well monitored or secured, providing meth producers with relatively easy access to some of the main ingredients they require for methamphetamine production. More education and information must be provided to the agriculture community on the best way to securely store these chemicals and why it is so important.

DRUG-ENDANGERED CHILDREN

46. The Federal Government should amend the criminal code to recognize child drug endangerment as a criminal code offence.

Children are in danger when people use, produce and sell drugs in their presence. It often causes them significant physical, mental and emotional harm. The Alberta government has implemented the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs (PChAD) Act, which provides children under the age of 18 with up to five days in a protective safe house. They are provided with detoxification and assessment of their possible use of alcohol and other drugs. This is just one measure to protect these children from further harm. Recognizing child drug endangerment as a criminal code offence would mean tougher sentences for persons responsible for the child's care.

COMMUNITY-BASED DRUG COURTS

47. Local drug treatment courts should be developed and modeled after the Alexis Court and the Edmonton Drug Treatment Court to address drug crimes and addictions issues in communities.

It is well recognized in the community that, in the absence of treatment or rehabilitation, drug abusers and traffickers will return to destructive lifestyles and continued criminal activity. The Alexis Court and Edmonton Drug Court are examples of innovative partnerships among the criminal justice system, drug addiction treatment services, and the community to help break the addiction and criminal cycle. They offer therapeutic and restorative justice which focuses on rehabilitation and accountability for one's actions. Local drug treatment courts would provide an opportunity for communities to be more actively involved in developing solutions that match their needs and the needs of the individuals involved.

YOUNG OFFENDERS TREATMENT

48. The Government of Canada should amend the Criminal Code so young persons accused of a crystal meth or any other drug offense are not diverted to alternative measures, and if they are convicted, they are sentenced to a secure custody facility where they can receive addictions and mental health counseling.

Youth, prosecutors and police confirm that crystal meth users, dealers and traffickers are often not deterred by the current judicial system. In particular, when youth are diverted from the court system and are required instead to do something less punitive than jail, such as community service, they are not sufficiently deterred from returning to a life of drugs and crime. In addition, diversion methods do not require a young person to receive addictions and mental health counseling, and that allows the cycle of drug abuse and criminal behavior to continue. Clearly, the price to be paid by drug offenders is not high enough.

PENALTIES FOR MANUFACTURING, POSSESSING, TRAFFICKING AND USE OF CRYSTAL METH

49. The Government of Canada should amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Criminal Code of Canada, and laws that govern bail and judicial interim release to make the manufacture, possession, trafficking and use of crystal meth or any other dangerous drug a serious violent offence that warrants incarceration before trial and upon conviction for each and every charge.

Drugs such as crystal meth are a serious threat to family and community safety and should be viewed that way under the law. Anyone charged with an offence that involves crystal meth or any other dangerous drug, whether they are youths or adults, should be brought to trial to face those charges, and if they are convicted, they should be given a custodial sentence followed by intensive court-supervised probation that includes addictions counseling.

DRUG TESTING ORDERS

50. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security should require drug testing for all court ordered, no drug use orders and partner with Regional Health Authorities to provide probation officers with timely access to drug testing and results.

Probation officers are responsible for enforcing court orders. Often, a court order involves no drug use; however, without testing, it is very difficult for probation officers to know, without doubt, whether or not a client is using drugs. Drug testing orders would provide probation officers with a tool to help fulfill their duties.

INCREASED PROBATION OFFICERS

51. The number of probation officers in urban and rural communities should be increased in order to deliver manageable client loads, improve officer safety, and increase their ability to address the needs of their clients and the directive of the Court.

Probation officers play a critical role in the criminal justice system, in communities, and in the addictions treatment and healing process. The number of probation officers has not increased in proportion to the increase in case volume. In addition, crystal meth clients are often more time consuming because their issues are complex and involve increased safety risks to the officers.

FEDERAL PROSECUTION

52. The Government of Canada should deem drug trafficking to be a serious violent crime, which means anyone accused of drug trafficking cannot be subject to diversion nor be eligible for a conditional sentence.

Deeming drug trafficking as a serious crime will ensure that those who commit drug crimes will not be diverted to a lesser punishment of community service and will no longer serve only one-sixth of their sentence.

53. The Government of Alberta should take over prosecutions of federal drug offenses under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act with the requisite transfer of federal funding.

The Task Force met with provincial prosecutors and police and heard a degree of frustration regarding the handling of cases by federal prosecutors. Current federal prosecution practices do not reflect the standards and expectations for prosecutions in our community and do not ensure that drugs are addressed as a crime affecting people, not just as a crime affecting property. The Task Force believes that drug charges and crimes should be vigorously prosecuted. Without an increase in the number of federal prosecutors and additional attention and resources added, federal prosecutors cannot fulfill their duty to prosecute federal drug offences in Alberta, and therefore, the Task Force feels it is better for the provincial government to handle these prosecutions.

INFORMATION SHARING

54. Provincial and federal privacy legislation should be amended to allow for the free flow of information to police and first responders where meth-related criminal activity is believed to be occurring and where public and community safety is at risk.

Police and first responders have difficulty accessing information that may be either useful or highly necessary to pursue a case. That could include information such as whether a residence is experiencing extremely high electricity consumption, which could corroborate a lead on a meth lab located in a residential area.

55. Privacy legislation and all other related legislation should be amended to enable and ensure the sharing of information among government and law enforcement agencies on the traffic and movement of products and precursors used in meth and drug production.

Law enforcement agencies do not have access to pertinent and often critical information relative to the movement of precursor chemicals coming into Alberta and moving within the province. Removing legislative barriers will increase interagency cooperation and ensure law enforcement has the necessary tools to get tough on drug producers and traffickers.

56. The Government of Canada should add a line to all Health Canada import/export forms stating that: "Information may be shared with other approved agencies." This would allow Health Canada to share the information with law enforcement and customs agencies in cases involving crystal meth.

A Health Canada form must be completed by anyone wishing to ship restricted products including chemicals that may be used as precursors to crystal meth. A signed form provides consent for personal information to be shared with other agencies listed on the form. Law enforcement agencies should be included on the list to provide an additional tool to help them pursue drug producers and traffickers.

57. Privacy legislation and health information legislation should be amended to enable first responders, health professionals, social workers, probation officers, addictions workers, and school officials to share information for the protection of children at risk.

Children at risk can be better protected when all service providers are able to work together more efficiently through the sharing of relevant information.

58. All police forces in Alberta should operate on a common information management system so they can share information, data and trends.

Currently, police forces across the province collect data differently with respect to drug users, traffickers and producers. Their methods and the type of information gathered are not consistent and this makes it extremely difficult to compare and combine data. A common information management system would improve capacity to monitor trends and data, leading to better deployment of police resources throughout Alberta.

JUSTICE SOCIAL POLICY SESSIONS

59. The Chief Justices for the Queen's Bench and the Provincial Court should hold social policy sessions on crystal meth and other drugs and related issues to enable judges to remain up to date on the latest trends, statistics and issues surrounding drug crimes, culture and treatment.

60. Alberta Justice should hold social policy sessions on crystal meth and other drug education and related issues to enable prosecutors to remain up to date on the latest trends, statistics and issues surrounding drug crimes, culture and treatment.

The drug scene is constantly changing. Crystal meth is prevalent today, but there will, most certainly, be a new drug in the future. Ongoing professional development will assist the judiciary and prosecutors to remain up to date on the latest trends and issues surrounding drug culture, crimes and available treatments.

INTENT TO PRODUCE

61. The Government of Canada should enact and/or amend legislation that places a reverse onus on the accused, requiring them to prove that the possession of precursors was for a purpose other than meth production.

Drug production and trafficking are serious and violent offences and the Task Force believes the judicial system should be tougher with people who commit these crimes. Police and customs agents confirmed that there is no reason why anyone would possess large quantities of precursors to meth unless they had the intent to produce meth. Reverse onus is in place today in Australia and the United States. The result is a great number of convictions for these crimes and a stronger deterrent for producers. This same standard of law needs to be brought to Canada.

62. The Government of Alberta should enact and proclaim legislation that would enable civil remedies with respect to the proceeds of crime, including provisions for the seizure and forfeiture of assets and property to the Crown that are, on balance of probabilities, the proceeds of crime.

Currently, the only means of seizing assets and removing the profitability of criminal enterprises is through a criminal prosecution. With this proposed change in legislation, the proceeds of crime will be forfeited to the Crown and criminal enterprises would be denied the opportunity to profit from selling drugs and other criminal activity. Based on the civil law principles of the balance of probabilities, these actions could be taken whether or not criminal charges are laid. This would be a valuable tool in removing the profitability of crime and protecting our children and communities.

CLASS A PRECURSOR LICENSE

63. Health Canada should require stricter guidelines for eligibility of a Class A Precursor License including the following requirements:

- A detailed account of the intended use for precursor chemicals to clearly demonstrate a legitimate purpose
- A site inspection prior to a license being granted to ensure there is a secure safe room for storage
- Regular inspections to ensure secure storage
- Report all subsequent sales of precursor chemicals to Health Canada immediately upon transaction.

Under the current regulations, it is too easy to receive a Class A Precursor License, allowing a business or individual to possess the chemicals that are used in the production of methamphetamine. The increased reporting and improved enforcement and inspection envisioned by this recommendation would bring Canada in line with regulations in the U.S. and ensure that those with illegitimate uses for these chemicals will now face greater scrutiny.

METH PRECURSOR DESTRUCTION

64. Health Canada should assume responsibility for the costs associated with the storage and destruction of all crystal meth products, precursor chemicals and waste from clandestine labs in a timely manner.

Health Canada is currently responsible only for the storage and destruction of meth but not its precursors, leaving police detachments to shoulder the responsibility and cost of precursor storage and destruction and diverting police resources away from more critical initiatives and priorities. Health Canada is responsible for all other aspects of precursor control and by adding this additional responsibility, greater clarity and focus will be brought to the system.

CLEAN-UP OF CONTAMINATED METH LAB & SYNTHETIC DRUG SITES

65. Alberta Environment should review guidelines and standards for the clean up, remediation and liability of all methamphetamine and synthetic drug production sites to assign responsibility for clean-up costs to a responsible party and the landowner.

Currently, there are no guidelines or standards in place to govern the clean up of a methamphetamine or synthetic drug production site. It is also not clear who should pay for the resulting costs. There also is a lack of certainty in the assessment of liability and responsibility and the environmental standards for remediation and clean-up. By enacting guidelines and standards for the clean up of methamphetamine and synthetic drug production lab sites, we can prevent further damage and degradation to Alberta's environment. As noted earlier in this report, Alberta Environment is taking steps to include wastes from illegal drugs as hazardous substances under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act.

66. The Government of Canada should enact legislation to enable remediation of drug sites on reserve lands.

As we enforce guidelines and standards for meth lab clean up on most lands in Alberta, we must also ensure that federal legislation and regulations are in place for cleaning up labs on reserve lands, with assurance that the same standards will be applied and the environment on reserve lands will be protected.

SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

All of the recommendations included in our report will help support Aboriginal people and communities affected by crystal meth. But based on our consultations with Aboriginal people, a number of specific steps should be taken to respond to their unique needs, traditions, and circumstances.

PREVENTION SUPPORT

67. The Government of Alberta should work with the Government of Canada to ensure that Aboriginal children, youth and young people have access to any prevention, treatment, and healing programs it provides for crystal meth addiction.

The Government of Alberta, working with the Government of Canada, should endeavor to extend its prevention programs throughout the province to rural, remote, isolated and Aboriginal communities as well as urban centres.

ABORIGINAL YOUTH PREVENTION AND EDUCATION

68. The Government of Alberta should direct its departments that work with Aboriginal communities to build and implement drug prevention and education strategies for Aboriginal youth and young adults.

Aboriginal community-based prevention and education initiatives involve youth, build circles of support within and outside the community, and focus on crystal meth and other drugs. These initiatives require support from both the provincial and federal governments. Both governments should seek out and ensure that the voice of Aboriginal communities and youth concerning crystal meth is heard.

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

69. The Government of Alberta should support Aboriginal community mobilization initiatives that build strong relationships, promote safe and healthy families, and focus on helping children, youth and young people develop their full potential through a meth-free future.

Crystal meth and other drug-related issues are too large for Aboriginal communities to address without supportive circles and partnerships with neighboring communities and others. Promising practices indicate that local relationship building and action plans are a key to success, and that direct hands-on government support and resources can support community action plans to tackle crystal meth.

DETOXIFICATION, TREATMENT AND HEALING

70. The Government of Alberta should work with the Government of Canada to support Aboriginal communities that are committed to a meth free future by ensuring that they have access to existing Government of Alberta programs and services, including treatment, healing and after care programs and services, family and youth supports, and drug and crime prevention initiatives.

Aboriginal people who need treatment for crystal meth addiction should have access to a reasonable choice of holistic healing programs, whether those are provided on or off reserve lands. The Government of Canada should contract with the Government of Alberta for the delivery of reasonable access to treatment, healing and after care services that are provided across the province. For example, AADAC has developed protocols based on best practices to provide treatment and healing services to drug users. Aboriginal communities would also benefit from these guidelines.

71. The Government of Canada should rescind its policy of requiring Aboriginal people to return to their home reserve for treatment services. This would allow Aboriginal people to choose treatment where they want it while still receiving federal government financial support.

Currently, Aboriginal peoples are only entitled to services delivered on reserve. Aboriginal people are concerned that this Health Canada policy unduly limits access, and may be more focused on efficiencies than reasonable access, healing, recovery and successful return to the community.

72. The Government of Alberta, through AADAC, should establish after care facilities for Aboriginal youth and young people who are moving back to their community after treatment so they can receive the appropriate life skills training and support in an environment that is connected to their Aboriginal community and culture.

There is limited after care and transitional support available on reserve for Aboriginal people returning from detox or treatment. Health Canada should pay for and ensure that Aboriginal people have timely access to, and reasonable choice of, holistic drug addiction treatment, healing and after care programs whether on or off First Nations reserves.

IMPROVING SERVICES AND ASSESSING RESULTS

Throughout its consultations, the Task Force learned about a number of important steps the provincial government could take to improve services, provide better coordination and integration, ensure that high standards are met and positive results are achieved. The government can also play a lead role in encouraging Alberta to become a leading centre of research and ideas on how to fight and prevent the spread of crystal meth.

INTEGRATING SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

73. Alberta Health and Wellness should provide funding to fully implement *Building Capacity – A Framework for Serving Albertans Affected by Addiction and Mental Health Issues*.

The Framework requires that addiction and mental health service providers adopt a “shared care responsibility” to provide common case management and seamless service delivery, regardless of a client’s point of entry. Each program and each clinician will develop fundamental “concurrent disorder capability” through direct training of current staff, hiring of cross-trained staff, mentoring through techniques such as job shadowing and collaboration with another service provider. In addition, AADAC and mental health offices should develop close working relationships in the community field offices. These are all positive steps that would have direct benefits to individuals and families affected by crystal meth and other drug addictions.

SUPPORT TO DISTANT OR REMOTE COMMUNITIES

74. Regional Health Authorities should use telehealth to provide integrated addictions and mental health services to rural and remote communities, where in-person care and service delivery is not possible, and to share information within urban centres.

The Task Force traveled to numerous rural communities to consult with Albertans. We learned that drug use is by no means limited to urban centres. Yet mental health and addictions services are not readily available in rural and remote areas across the province. One way to bridge the gap is for regional health authorities to use technology such as telehealth to bring the necessary expertise and support to these communities.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN AADAC AND REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES

75. Health and Wellness should develop and implement an effective forum for ongoing communication and joint planning to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to dealing with crystal meth and other drug addiction and health related issues in our communities.

There are many service providers across the province that are working hard to provide treatment and healing to Albertans in need. Alberta Health and Wellness can play a pivotal role in ensuring that information on drug trends, best practices and available services available is shared across the province. Information sharing is critical so all providers can benefit from the latest expertise and a coordinated and integrated approach to service delivery. Joint planning also serves to educate those communities that have not yet been exposed to drugs like crystal meth, so that they are prepared for it, if and when it does arrive.

76. Regional Health Authorities should develop and implement clear province-wide protocols, based on best practices, to address how patients who are high on meth or other drugs are managed within the hospital system.

Protocols for the treatment of crystal meth users are not consistently applied across the province. In fact, it is often the efforts of dedicated health professionals who work to find the right resources in addictions and mental health treatment that make sure individuals do not fall through the cracks. To ensure adherence to best practices and provide a continuum of care for meth users, regional health authorities should work together to develop and implement clear province-wide protocols.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

77. All provincially-funded addictions programs and services, from prevention through to aftercare, should develop, implement and annually report on performance measurements to allow government and Albertans to evaluate how these programs and systems are working and supporting people in need.

Performance evaluation and measurement is an area of great importance to the Task Force. All treatment programs, detox and after care facilities for children, youth and young adults that receive public funding should have strong performance measurement systems and evidence-based outcomes in place, to help measure success and ensure accountability.

ACCREDITATION FOR ADDICTIONS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

78. Alberta Health and Wellness should examine the need for all provincially and privately funded, not-for-profit and for-profit addictions programs and service agencies to be addictions-accredited to ensure that there is adherence to standards and that the necessary funding and supports are provided.

Requiring all addictions service programs and services to be accredited would introduce a means of evaluating programs and services and demonstrate dedication to excellence among service providers. It would also provide government and the public with added confidence that the service environment is safe and the programs are of the highest quality. At the same time, it is important to recognize that accreditation has to be flexible enough to allow effective programs, including programs involving Aboriginal elders, to continue to operate.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON ADDICTIONS

79. Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Advanced Education, in conjunction with professional colleges, implement an addiction and meth awareness, education and best practices program for health professionals, including those receiving training in a post-secondary institution.

The Task Force met many health professionals, including emergency physicians and registered nurses. These health professionals need to be aware of the latest drug trends and the need for a collaborative approach to treatment and healing. We were told that additional training on addictions and drugs, including meth, is required to ensure health professionals are equipped with the knowledge and best practices to treat drug users most effectively. A training program will ensure that no drug user leaves a medical facility without a collaborative treatment that includes addictions and mental health services.

80. AADAC should strengthen its speakers' bureau to include various groups and individuals (health professionals, addictions specialists, former users) to help spread the message among front-line professionals working in the health system.

AADAC's expertise in dealing with addiction was consistently acknowledged throughout our consultations; however, we also heard about the need to educate health professionals on drug trends, best treatment practices, and the services available for a drug user. The Task Force believes AADAC is in the best position to educate health professionals on an ongoing basis, to ensure they remain current on what drugs people are using, where to go for help, and the best treatment and healing practices.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN THE ADDICTIONS SERVICE SECTOR

81. Alberta Health and Wellness should increase funding to contracted agencies for staffing, specifically to increase salaries to ensure the addictions sector has the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff.

Due to the current labour market pressures, all service providers are having serious difficulty attracting and retaining qualified staff. It is particularly difficult to recruit staff willing to work shift hours, especially on evenings and weekends. The Task Force heard from virtually all service providers that the quantity as well as the quality of applicants has significantly decreased in recent years. Increased funding will assist service providers in their quest to attract and retain qualified staff.

EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

82. Alberta Health and Wellness should create a system for collecting data and information on drug and addictions trends in Alberta from treatment facilities, law enforcement, the criminal justice system, corrections, the education system, probations, health authorities and others.

Better data is absolutely essential to assess the effectiveness of current programs and services and to guide future decisions. The data would be aggregated and available online for all partners as well as the province's research institutions. It would support original research on issues relating to drugs, addictions and related health, criminal issues, and the societal impact of drugs. The province's research universities should be encouraged and supported to undertake original research in these areas.

A steering committee of committed agencies and partners should be formed to strategically plan and guide this collection and research planning effort, to ensure it delivers a strong information system and helps position Alberta as a research leader in the field of drugs and drug addictions.

83. The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research should undertake to establish Alberta as a leader in crystal meth research.

The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research (AHFMR) supports researchers who are dedicated to improving the health and quality of life of Albertans and people throughout the world. AHFMR is committed to funding health research based on international standards of excellence. The Task Force believes that AHFMR is a logical choice to build Alberta into a leader in crystal meth research.