



Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE MANITOBA ADVOCATE'S STATEMENT OF CONCERN ON ADDICTIONS SERVICES FOR YOUTH

Manitoba Advocate Sherry Gott announces solution-focused roundtable discussion to address barriers to effective and responsive addiction treatment services for youth in Manitoba.

APRIL 16, 2024 – TREATY 1 TERRITORY AND HOMELAND OF THE RED RIVER MÉTIS, Winnipeg, Man.

The office of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is calling attention to the ongoing addictions crisis affecting youth in Manitoba, and the urgent work which remains to address and prevent the potential harms of addictions and inadequate mental health service responses across our province. In the last five years, the Advocate has seen increased numbers of child deaths related to substance misuse.

Children and youth in Manitoba are entitled to protection from drug-related harms and the highest standard of health and mental health care services, including addiction services, as articulated in Articles 33 and 24 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. It is the responsibility of the Government of Manitoba to protect these rights by addressing barriers to effective and responsive addiction treatment services for youth.

"Our office has been engaging with various stakeholders who provide direct support to children and youth with addictions issues, as well as those responsible for overseeing the operational and legislated mandates for these supports," said Manitoba Advocate Sherry Gott. **"What we have heard is there are service gaps and an absence of continuum of care models, which means youth are not receiving supports that match their needs in a timely manner." Stakeholders emphasized the importance of better service coordination, education and awareness, improved accessibility and availability of resources, and improved relationships between service providers.**

MACY has also been consulting with youth who have lived experience with addictions to hear first-hand about their needs and experiences. Gott explains, "most youth we spoke to were unaware of the spectrum of services available to them. They identified an urgent need for more information about resources and support in how to access them. **While they all identified the need to talk about their struggles and to receive professional support, they emphasized how difficult it is to find a youth addictions counsellor.**" Many barriers to accessing services exist, with youth explaining they need comfortable, home-like spaces where they feel safe and supported, and have access to holistic, long-term, and crisis support services. Finally, because youth indicated substance use was overwhelmingly being used as a coping mechanism, there is a clear and longstanding need to address the root causes of addictions across Manitoba – such as trauma, abuse, housing instability, and poverty.

Our office expresses our support and appreciation for the dedicated youth addiction service providers in Manitoba. "These professionals play a crucial role in our community, offering essential care and support to youth who are struggling with addiction," added Gott. "We recognize their commitment and commendable efforts in the face of challenges, and we stand by them in their mission to improve the lives of our young people."

That said, addiction and mental health service providers face significant challenges and limitations in their vital work. It is imperative that the Government of Manitoba inject more resources into addiction prevention and intervention, including a youth-focused strategy, and that we come together as a community to address these concerns collectively. **To this end, we are pleased to announce that MACY is facilitating a roundtable discussion with the aim of collaboratively addressing the issues surrounding youth addiction services in Manitoba.**

Roundtable Discussion on Addictions Services

The roundtable discussion serves as a platform for dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders. Discussions are focusing on the issue of youth addictions and service provision. In order to develop comprehensive solutions, collaboration among service providers, government agencies, and experts is essential.

As Gott explains, "our shared goal is to ensure that every young person in our province has access to the necessary support and care to overcome addiction and lead healthy, fulfilling lives. We are committed to hearing and standing with young people and service providers. Through this roundtable, we aim to strengthen collective efforts in support of our children and youth."

We look forward to engaging in meaningful discussions and working together to address these vital concerns in order to create a brighter, addiction-free future for the youth of Manitoba.

If you or someone you know is struggling, help is available.

- Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line (toll free): 1-877-435-7170
- Kids Help Phone (toll free): 1-800-668-6868
- 24-hour Youth Crisis Services in Winnipeg: 204-949-4777
- 24-hour Youth Crisis Services outside Winnipeg: 1-888-383-2776
- Residential School Survivor Support Line: 1-866-925-441

Media Contact:

Lindsay Ridgley, Manager of Public Education

(204) 451-6111

lriddgley@manitobaadvocate.ca

About the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth:

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is an independent, non-partisan office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The office represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children, youth, and young adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or should be receiving, provincial public services. MACY does this by providing direct advocacy support to young people and their families, by reviewing public service delivery after the death or serious injury of a child, and by conducting child-centred research regarding the effectiveness of public services in Manitoba. The Manitoba Advocate is empowered by legislation to make recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of services provided to children, youth, and young adults. MACY is mandated through *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, guided by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and acts according to the best interests of children and youth.