North Zone
Mental Health and Wellness
Recovery Services
Executive Summary
for Albertans impacted by the
2016 Fort McMurray Wildfire
Introduction and background:

The purpose of this plan is to outline a recovery plan for Addiction and Mental Health that addresses residents and community partners, Indigenous populations, clients and other stakeholders, AHS staff, physicians, and emergency responders in the Wood Buffalo area.

The concepts and approach for mental health recovery has been approved by Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services. The details of the plan will be developed in consultation with community members, clients, and other stakeholders including Alberta Health, AHS provincial Addiction and Mental Health, Wood Buffalo Regional Municipality, and First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FNHIHB) and their partners. Collaboration and engagement will be required at all stages of the plan and will include partners such as municipalities, non-governmental organizations, Canadian Mental Health Association, and Aboriginal partners.

Alberta Health Services North Zone provides a broad range of comprehensive services to the nearly 95,000 people living in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo including Fort McMurray (Source: Population Health Database and DIMR Postal Code Translation file). Approximately 85,000 of those were required to evacuate their homes and communities in early May, 2016. This is the largest evacuation in Alberta’s history.

The affected population includes:

- 0-4 years of age: 7,538
- 5 – 14 years: 10,141
- 15 – 19 years: 4,599
- 20 – 64 years: 69,596
- 65+ years: 3,026

(Source: Population Health Database and DIMR Postal Code Translation file)

The communities surrounding Fort McMurray include several different Aboriginal populations.

One of the unique circumstances is the existence of many large-scale industry-related work camps in the region, a number of which hosted evacuees in the early stages of the event. Many people living and working in the region have recently been affected by the downturn in the oil industry. Any existing or emerging health issues may be exacerbated due to this and recent changes in population counts may not be reflected in data sources and population estimates.

Specific addiction and mental health resources will be required for the period of and immediately following the return of residents to Fort McMurray. Given that schools will not be open again for this school year, we anticipate return to the community to occur over the course of the summer. Ongoing deployment of services and supports will be required for the entire reentry period and further assessment and adjustment over time. We will be drawing from other zones to support the delivery of mental health services and we will develop a plan based on the needs identified by the community, with the community.

Addiction and Mental Health services will be required to address immediate needs and to build community capacity and resiliency over the longer term. The North Zone will align its plans with those being developed by the Government of Alberta, AHS provincial AMH, and other zones and in the context of lessons learned from past events, some of which have taken place in the North Zone. We have learned much from the 2011 Slave Lake Fire, the 2013 Calgary/Southern Alberta flooding, and the support we offered in Cold Lake to residents fleeing fires in Saskatchewan in 2015. Using the proven tools and materials developed during those critical incidents, reviewing literature and best practice, we will work closely with staff and other partners, including community based organizations, to help meet needs and rebuild a strong and resilient community in the wake of the current wildfires.

Alberta Health Services is a trauma-informed organization. Reactions to trauma and crisis range in severity; even the most acute responses are natural mechanisms we use to manage trauma. They are not a sign of weakness or illness. Individual coping styles are varied.
Our goals will be to partner with our stakeholders to:

- support the community to return to health and wellness
- establish safety,
- promote resiliency,
- avoid retraumatization, and
- establish routine and a return to normalcy

Services will be developed to meet the needs of various groups within Fort McMurray and Area including:

- General Community Members- with specific approaches developed for children, youth, and seniors
- Indigenous communities and other NGOs and government organizations that partner with these communities
- Current clients and patients in acute/inpatient and community settings
- Industry partnership to support ongoing wellness
- AHS staff, physicians, volunteers, and first responders including EMS, fire fighters, police, etc.to ensure they are best able to take care of our communities, patients, clients, and residents

Key Assumptions:

- Phased in approach to the re-entry to Fort McMurray to occur throughout summer 2016
- Recovery planning will need to span from current day and out 3-5 years
- Community and community organization partnership will be key in the development and implementation of services to support community recovery

Community engagement

Community representation, engagement, and collaboration is critical in the co-development of recovery services and ongoing adjustment of these services to meet the recovery needs of Fort McMurray and area. We will operate under the value of “Nothing about me or for me without me”.

- To date, consultation and engagement has occurred with the following groups local Health Advisory Council, local Indigenous groups and partner organizations including (Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay, Janvier, Gregoire Lake, Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, Wood Buffalo Municipality Manager for First Nation and Metis Nation Relations, and First Nations Inuit Health), Director of Community Services for the Wood Buffalo Municipality
- Collaboration with these partners will be ongoing
- Ongoing meetings are also occurring with Alberta Health and other ministry partners as well as other NGOs to ensure strong ongoing collaboration and integration of support as we work together to support Fort McMurray in recovery from the forest fire devastation

Current Services:

To date Alberta Health Services has provided over 9300 community and first responder wellness and mental health visits. We will continue to support the community with this much needed service.

Welcome Centres

- AHS has supported all of the welcome centres that have been established by Wood Buffalo Municipality throughout the reentry period including the Indigenous Welcome Centre
- We will continue to support the welcome/information centre at the Future Forward building as established by the municipality and planned to be in place until September.

Damaged Home Viewing

- Home sifting services are being provided through Rubicon
- AHS continues to support this work through mental health resources placed at the entry and exit to the affected communities to provide psychosocial supports including information, 1:1 intervention and well as take home resources and offers for follow up counselling
- In addition the team is supporting public home inspections for those homes still standing in the devastated areas
Roving Wellness Services
- AHS has established a 24/7 locally accessible community wellness service
- This team is out in the community (attending playgrounds, community BBQs, and other community functions) and can be accessed directly by individuals who may be experiencing challenges related to the fires and ongoing coping
- Services are provided by individuals trained in psychological first aid

Aboriginal Outreach
- AHS has established a travelling Aboriginal Mental Health team to support the psychosocial recovery needs related to the fire for the communities of Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay, Janvier, and Gregoire Lake
- The team will provide on the ground as well as virtual (telehealth) addiction, mental health, community wellness, and family violence prevention services and will consider the needs of children, youth, and families in the delivery of services

Traditional Addiction and Mental Health Services
- Regular booked and drop in Addiction and Mental Health appointments as well as psychiatry are available at the Queen Street building.
- Crisis service team is in place at the Northern Light Regional Hospital Emergency Department to support the needs of individuals presenting with addiction and mental health concerns.
- Inpatient psychiatry beds are open at the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre

Medium to Long Term Mental Health and Wellness Services:

The above noted services will be monitored over the medium and long term to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the community. In addition additional responses will be co-developed with community to meet the ongoing needs as they are identified. These services will include, but will not be limited to:

Training Sessions
- We will work with our partners to establish and respond to the need for additional and ongoing training such as psychological first aid, mental math, skills for psychological recovery, etc. to be provided to support community recovery

Education System
- Identifying and developing response for the psychosocial needs of children and families as school resumes in the fall

Community Outreach
- Continuing to provide outreach and drop in services for the broader community as outlined above
- Service listings will be available through calling Health Link at *811

Traditional Addiction and Mental Health Services
- Reestablish other community services such as residential addiction and recovery services. Currently, these services are being provided to FMM residents outside the community. As soon as the buildings where we provide these services are restored services will be reestablished locally
Resources Available

You are not Alone – poster and client information package: - distributed to over 30 hotels in North Zone and all PCN’s

Text4Mood – supportive text messages for Albertans – content broadened to reflect circumstances; underway and will continue as plans progress

Online
Note: resources will be migrated onto My Health Alberta

- Helping Your Child or Teen Prepare Emotionally For Disasters or Emergencies
- Helping Your Child or Teen Respond to a Disaster or Emergency
- Helping Children and Teens Recover from a Disaster or Traumatic Events
- Preparing Emotionally for Disasters or Emergencies
- Psychological First Aid After a Disaster
- Responding to a Disaster or Emergency
- Recovery after a Disaster or Emergency
- Skills for Psychological Recovery After a Disaster
- Skills for Psychological Recovery for Health Professionals
- Additional resources -www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh

For any residents who were vulnerable to depression, or have been recently diagnosed with depression, the 3 resources in our Managing Depression series may also be useful: www.heretohelp.bc.ca/managing-depression
- Managing Depression: Dealing with a Depression Diagnosis
- Managing Depression: Working with your Doctor for Depression
- Managing Depression: Preventing Relapse of Depression

Resources on Grieving: http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/grieving

Important Contacts

- Health Link (Health advice from a registered nurse and where to find health care) 811
- Poison & Drug Information Service 1-800-332-1414
- Mental Health Helpline (Mental health advice, crisis intervention, information and referrals) 1-877-303-2642
- Alberta Government Emergency Updates http://www.alberta.ca/emergency.cfm
  Alberta Supports Contact Centre (Helping you find and apply for family and social supports). 1-866-644-5135
- Highway Conditions and Closures 511
- Red Cross (Evacuees and family members looking for evacuees) 1-888-350-6070 www.redcross.ca
• Alberta Emergency Alerts
  http://emergencyalert.alberta.ca/

Mental Health supports for workers

• Any AHS staff member feeling stressed or concerned in any way have access to our Emergency and Family Assistance Program. Staff should call 1-877-273-3134.

• EMS staff are urged to use our Critical Incident Stress Management and Peer Support Program. 1-855-512-4127. (this service has been offered to the firefighters)

• Experiencing a disaster such as the Fort McMurray fires can be incredibly stressful and overwhelming. If you need to talk, call the Mental Health Help Line at 1-877-303-2642 or Health Link at 811