

A Standard Approach to Concurrent Capable  
Mental Health and Addiction Services

# A Handbook for Individuals and Families



## Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the work of the participants who helped create this handbook and are grateful for their valuable contributions. In particular, we want to thank the people receiving care and their family members who so generously participated in a focus group to provide critical feedback on the development of this handbook. Their suggestions and validation of content were invaluable.

The Standard Approach to Concurrent Capable Care articulated in the handbook aligns to The Patient First Strategy (2017) and Accreditation Canada Standards (2016). This approach was developed following a literature review and discussions within the organization with a variety of key collaborators, including provincial and zone partners. Representation was inclusive of front-line healthcare providers from a wide range of practice settings and roles, managers, directors, educators, clinical supervisors, and people receiving care and their family members.

We are committed to reviewing this handbook every three years to ensure it remains a valuable resource to individuals and families accessing Mental Health and Addiction services within Recovery Alberta, and to the staff and leaders who provide quality, person-centred, recovery-oriented, trauma and violence-informed, gender and culturally safe care. Please email us at [amh.practicesupports@recoveryalberta.ca](mailto:amh.practicesupports@recoveryalberta.ca) with your feedback and questions.

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# Introduction

Recovery Alberta, Mental Health and Addiction Services is committed to making it easier for Albertans to access services and supports for mental health, substance use, and addiction concerns.

This handbook will explain what you, as a person receiving care or a family member, can expect of Recovery Alberta staff and other service providers in your care experience as established by provincial, national, and international best practices. The indicators listed in each section are a way for you to know that the expectations are being met.



# Background

When a person experiences a mental health, substance use or addiction concern, these issues often influence one another. Treatment outcomes for concurrent concerns or disorders are improved when they can be recognized and treated together at the same time.

In 2009, Alberta Health Services (AHS) announced a province-wide system of addiction and mental health services that would respond to the unique needs of three groups of people:

1. those with mental illness or mental disorders.
2. those with substance use or addiction concerns.
3. those with both.

In 2015, AHS launched its Patient First Strategy (PFS). This strategy places patients and their families at the centre of managing their own health and wellness.

In 2024, Recovery Alberta was established as a new provincial health agency, created to provide comprehensive and accessible recovery-oriented care to Albertans.

The Standard Approach to Concurrent Capable Care and this handbook, are written from the perspective of a person receiving care and their families. This is because you and your family are active participants in your recovery journey.

**By developing this approach, we affirm our commitment to you, your families and your care teams.**



# 1

## Welcoming and Engaging

You, your family and your care team are welcomed and engaged as active participants in your care. You feel accepted and hopeful when you access services.

### Key Indicators

- You are welcomed warmly when you reach out to us for assistance with your substance use, addiction and/or mental health concerns, and you are invited to involve your family and other people that support you, such as a care team.
- Your provider explains their role, how you can agree to treatment, the limits of confidentiality, and how you can agree to allow others to be involved in your treatment.
- Your provider ensures you have access to educational information about your addiction and/or mental health concerns. They listen to you, answer your questions, empathize with you and work with you in finding the most appropriate resources, while being respectful of your cultural beliefs and lifestyle.
- Your provider helps you access services quickly and in a coordinated manner, and supports you through any delays.
- Your provider is open, transparent, and respectful towards you, your family and your care team.
- You, your family and your care team are encouraged to be engaged in your care and are asked to sign consent forms, when appropriate.
- Your provider explains the process of filing a complaint if you have concerns about the way you are treated, or the services you receive.
- You are asked to provide feedback on your experience so that we can continue to improve services.



# Screening

When you enter our service system, you are asked some questions, and may be asked to fill in a screening questionnaire about your use of alcohol, other drugs and gambling, as well as your history and experience with any mental health concerns. This helps your provider work with you and the rest of your care team in your recovery.

## Key Indicators

- With your consent, your provider asks you or your family questions about substance use, gambling, and mental health concerns. Your provider will use this information to offer you a variety of services to meet your needs.
- You and your family feel engaged and understand the purpose of the screening questions and how your answers help make sure you are connected with the most appropriate services.
- You may be asked to complete a short questionnaire, called a screening tool, that will help your provider identify health concerns that may require treatment, and support you in setting your goals for recovery.





STANDARD

3

# Comprehensive Assessment

Your provider reviews or gathers more information about you to fully understand your concerns and the goals you wish to accomplish. Giving extra attention to your current strengths, skills, supports and periods of well-being provides a positive, recovery-focused approach to treatment.

## Key Indicators

- With your consent, your provider asks you, your family and your care team additional questions to give them an even better picture of what you are experiencing, and to identify your strengths to help you set goals for recovery.
- Your provider listens to you, your family and your care team to ensure you receive the best care, at the right place and in a timely manner.
- With your consent, your information is shared with your care team and family so they are able to support you in your recovery.



STANDARD

# 4

## Integrated Treatment and Recovery Planning

Integrated treatment and recovery planning is developing a treatment and recovery plan that focuses on interventions for managing your mental health, substance use and addiction concerns at the same time during treatment.

Plans are developed in collaboration between you, your healthcare provider, and others involved in your care. They focus on your needs, motivation, strengths, and goals.

### Key Indicators

- With your consent, your provider invites you, your family and your care team to participate in planning and shares information to support you in your recovery.
- With your consent, your family is encouraged to participate in your recovery journey.
- You are an active participant in your care, which means your provider tells you your rights and responsibilities while respecting your preferences and goals. You have responsibility for your recovery journey.
- Your provider explains the risks and benefits of each option for recovery and supports you and your family in accessing resources.
- Your recovery plan ensures you receive the most appropriate care in a timely manner, and that you feel empowered to meet your basic needs, and your addiction and mental health concerns.
- Whenever possible, you receive a copy of your goals for recovery.



STANDARD

5

# Comprehensive Interventions

You participate in activities you have chosen to support your recovery that are matched to your needs, preferences and desires, and that renew your sense of hope over your future.

## Key Indicators

- Your provider explains treatment options to you, your family and your care team, giving you an understanding of the services offered and the risks and benefits of each. Your choices are respected.
- Your provider gives you educational information that helps you, your family and your care team make decisions about your recovery and set goals that work for you, giving you the best opportunity for success.
- You feel involved in your care, learning skills and effective self-care, and understand how to connect with peer support groups and community resources to regain quality of life and maintain your well-being.
- Your family understands how to access community supports and resources that promote their well-being and recovery.



STANDARD

6

## Transitions in Care

You are part of a team that recognizes you may have multiple needs, and works together to ensure the services you receive are coordinated and match your goals for recovery. The team recognizes that each person recovers at their own pace, which means some individuals may require longer-term supports.

### Key Indicators

- Your provider recognizes that your goals may benefit from a multidisciplinary team approach and supports you by matching your needs to other care providers, as required, to achieve this. Your provider builds on your strengths to assist you in meeting your goals.
- Your provider helps you navigate the system to ensure you are connected with community services as required (e.g., housing, finance, legal, education).
- Your family and care team are your advocates, working collaboratively to ensure the services you receive are coordinated.
- You, your family and your care team make sure you have supports in place to help you achieve your recovery goals at all stages, and gives you a written list of community resources as needed.
- You, your family and your care team help you manage your recovery by using your strengths and the skills you have learned in our service.
- Your provider tells you how to re-engage with services, if needed.
- With your consent, information regarding your care and progress is shared with the rest of your care team.
- You and your family provide feedback on your experience so we can continue to improve.



## Conclusion

Recovery Alberta, Mental Health and Addiction Services aims to improve access to mental health and addiction supports for Albertans. This handbook outlines what individuals and families can expect from staff and service providers, guided by best practices.

It includes indicators to help ensure these expectations are being met. It will be updated as concurrent capable practice continues to evolve and change.

If you have suggestions on how this handbook can be improved, please email: [amh.practicesupports@recoveryalberta.ca](mailto:amh.practicesupports@recoveryalberta.ca).





# Appendix I

## Glossary

### Care team

The team of people who work with you and your family to ensure you receive the support you need to achieve your goals in your recovery journey. This may include family physicians, medical specialists, elders, community or school counsellors, probation officers, caseworkers, psychiatrists, addiction workers, mental health therapists, peer support workers, housing support workers, outreach workers and teachers.

### Comprehensive assessment

Questions asked by your provider to get further information about your health concerns, your desires, goals for treatment, and your strengths to support you in your recovery journey.

### Concurrent capable

Concurrent capable care is providing welcoming, person-centred, recovery-oriented, trauma and violence-informed, gender and culturally safe care within our services for people experiencing concurrent or co-occurring disorders.

### Co-occurring disorders/Concurrent disorders

A concurrent disorder is a term that describes a situation where a person is experiencing a mental health and substance use disorder or behavioural addiction at the same time.

### Coordinated care

You are provided with the support and follow up you need to be most successful in your recovery journey, including community supports and self-help options while ensuring you, your family and care team have the understanding and knowledge of how to re-engage with services as required based on the recognition that your needs will fluctuate over the course of your lifetime.

### Family

The people you consider part of your support system. This can include immediate relatives, extended family, partners, friends, advocates, cultural supports, parents or guardians.



### Guideline

Establish a course of action that aligns with best practice, but individuals are afforded a reasonable amount of professional judgment. Guidelines may be authored with a Provincial or Zone/Local applicability.

### Informed consent

Agreeing to treatment, or allowing your provider to share information, only after you, your family and your care team understand the benefits and risks of each option.

### Integrated treatment and recovery planning

Integrated treatment and recovery planning is developing a treatment and well-being plan that focuses on interventions for managing your mental health, substance use and addiction concerns at the same time during treatment.

### Recovery journey

A process of change through which you can improve your health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach your full potential.

### Screening

Questions that help identify whether you are experiencing a substance use disorder, addiction, and/or a mental health disorder.

### Social determinants of health

Factors that influence our health, including employment status, level of education, income, where we live, our childhood experiences and our physical environment that surrounds us.

### Standard

The level of performance that establishes best practices and provides a reference against which actual performances can be compared.

### Transitions in Care

Refers to the movement of individuals of all age groups between health care providers, services, and/or sectors.

### Welcoming

You, your family, and care team are greeted respectfully and in a non-judgemental manner at every visit and feel like you and your concerns are genuinely cared about.





# Appendix II

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## Notes

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