



AUDIT AT A GLANCE

Performance Audit of Saskatchewan Health Authority: Delivering Opioid Addiction Treatment Services

Why It Matters

Drug toxicity deaths continue to rise in Saskatchewan increasing over 22% from 2022 to 2023 alone. Opioid abuse comes with significant risks such as dependence, addiction, overdose, and death. The Saskatchewan Health Authority directly operates medication-assisted treatment programs—Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) and Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine (RAAM)—at outpatient clinics across the province serving clients with opioid use disorder.

Why We Did This Audit

In 2023, 341 people died from opioid drug toxicity in Saskatchewan due to prevalent drug use and toxicity linked to substances such as fentanyl and other opioids.

Effectively delivering timely opioid addiction treatment services can reach those struggling with addiction, reduce the risk of overdose or death, and help address this public health crisis.



Key Facts and Figures

- \$4.6 million budgeted in 2024–25 for outpatient clinics providing OAT and RAAM; budgeted over \$306 million on mental health and addictions services
- RAAM clinics located in North Battleford, Prince Albert, Regina, and Saskatoon
- 13 OAT programs in 11 communities providing treatment to over 4,600 clients (May 2024)
- Four of six clients tested did not receive OAT medication while in social detox, which can increase risk of relapse and death
- 16 out of 30 clients tested did not have opioid withdrawal assessments completed before OAT medication prescribed



What We Found

The Saskatchewan Health Authority does not analyze wait times at its outpatient clinics or supply and demand for opioid addiction treatment services across Saskatchewan.

Our testing found clients waited an average of 4 days in Kamsack and 4.75 days in Saskatoon (but 1.75 days in Regina) in 2024 from initial program contact to their first appointment with an OAT program prescriber (physician); good practice recommends clients wait no more than 3 days.

We also found Lloydminster and Estevan had higher average drug toxicity deaths between 2022 and 2024 but do not have OAT programs.



We Made Eight Recommendations

The Saskatchewan Health Authority needs to:

- Clearly communicate opioid addiction treatment services available in the province
- Analyze supply and demand for opioid addiction treatment services across the province to support timely treatment and effective use of resources
- Consistently offer clients with opioid use disorder appropriate medication during detox to decrease risks of relapse, illness, or death
- Always complete opioid withdrawal assessments before prescribing OAT medication and provide timely treatment (initial and follow-up) to clients receiving outpatient opioid addiction treatment services
- Complete discharge/transfer plans for clients receiving inpatient opioid addiction treatment services
- Implement standardized approaches (e.g., central IT system) for its opioid addiction treatment services
- Analyze and report on key performance information to measure the effectiveness of opioid addiction treatment services