

Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Public Health Emergencies: Addition of Pandemic Prescribing to Northern Health COVID-19 Call Centre

The proposed addition to the Northern Health COVID-19 Call Centre service was developed in alignment with the BC Centre on Substance Use guidance document “Risk Mitigation in the Context of Dual Public Health Emergencies” to provide coordinated and accessible service to vulnerable populations who use substances and need to self-isolate. This is a harm reduction approach to reduce risk for COVID-19 transmission, reduce the need for people to turn to increasingly more dangerous and expensive illicit substances, and reduce the number of overdoses and unplanned withdrawals in Northern communities.

The following process describes how a patient would receive the service and accompanying follow-up:

- Patient calls the Northern Health COVID-19 Call Centre
- Patient answers screening questions from the virtual clinic team to gather medical COVID risk information, substance use history, and identify patient goal (OAT access, withdrawal prevention, pharmaceutical alternatives to toxic street drug supply, etc)
- Patient is connected to a local service, where available, and where this is not possible patient is connected virtually to a care provider for a consultation through the following steps:
 - Substance use virtual clinic support staff provide local program contact information and assist with referral if the patient has local resources to access
 - If no local resource exists or access is not possible for the patient, a consultation is scheduled with the patient and a virtual care provider
 - The consultation is entered into the electronic medical record and a notification is sent to the primary care provider through the system
- Care provider performs an assessment and, where appropriate, initiates pharmaceutical treatment for the patient
- Prescription is issued to nearest pharmacy from where the medication can delivered, daily witnessed, or the prescription can be filled and taken to the safe isolation space by the patient, delivered by pharmacy or supported by outreach team
- Follow-up and monitoring is arranged for the patient with the closest appropriate healthcare service
- A follow-up appointment with the virtual clinic is arranged, where indicated, or handed over to the closest available service

COVID-19 Call Centre
Provides medical COVID-19 screening, substance use screening and history, and identifies patient goal for care. Connects patients to local resources where available and arranges for consultation with addictions medicine care provider for patients without access
Virtual Substance Use Clinic
ROTA of care providers, supported by administrative professional staff, who are comfortable working within the framework detailed in the Risk Mitigation guideline who will provide consultations to patients needing virtual support for substance use in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing Opioid emergency. Administrative support staff will connect patients with resources in the area that they live after the consultation has occurred for follow up and monitoring
Primary Care Interprofessional Teams and Community Specialized Services
Provide the follow-up support and monitoring needed for clients who receive care through the virtual clinic. Can support the local monitoring, delivery of medications, and follow-up needs of patients who receive support from the virtual clinic

