



Brandon's Addictions Crisis: A Roadmap to Solutions

Prepared By: Westman Families of Addicts

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More information about Westman Families of Addicts can be found at www.westmanfamofaddicts.ca.

Table of Contents

Introduction and Background	2
Conversation Cafe	2
What We Heard	3
What Resources Do We Have?	3
Community Education	3
Better Systems of Support for People with Addiction	4
Better Systems of Support for Families and Friends	5
What Can We Do?	5

Introduction and Background

On December 10, 2019, twenty community members braved the extreme cold and attended a community conversation on the addiction crisis in Brandon hosted by Westman Families of Addicts (WFA). They gathered to share their stories and discuss solutions. Those conversations were summarized into a draft report that was then shared with people that have life experience with addiction, as well as forum participants for additional information and feedback. This is the report on all of these community conversations. Its purpose is to add to the ongoing demand from people struggling with addiction, along with their family, friends, and front-line workers, for governments at all levels to take action.

Conversation Cafe

WFA's community conversation was based on the *Conversation Cafe*¹ model. We wanted to create a space where people could share in order to better understand each other and the problem. Our ultimate goal was to create positive change in our community by finding and implementing solutions to our addictions crisis.

Participants were asked two questions and given opportunity to discuss them at length with others in the room. Those questions were:

- 1) What do people struggling with addiction need, and what about the family and friends supporting them?
- 2) What can you or your organization bring to the table to help address this ongoing crisis in our community?

There was also an opportunity for participants to list supports and services that they have accessed as they support people struggling with addictions.

¹ More information about Conversation Cafes can be found at, www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Conversation%20Cafe%20Tool.pdf.

What We Heard

Three main themes emerged from the conversations: more community education, better systems of support for people with addiction, and better systems of support for the families and friends helping them. We also heard that alcohol, methamphetamine, and opioids are amongst the most common (certainly not the only) substances used by many people living with addiction in Brandon.

What Resources Do We Have?

Brandon already has a number of resources to support people living with addiction and WFA felt it was important to ask participants to identify places where help can be found. This is a list of resources identified during the conversations and does not necessarily identify all resources available in Brandon.

- Samaritan House
- Community Health and Housing Association housing unit
- Community Mobilization HUB
- Brandon Boxing Club
- Westman Families of Addicts
- 7th Street Health Access Centre
 - RAAM Clinic with a doctor that can prescribe Suboxone.
- Crystal Meth Anonymous that has closed meetings for people with a meth addiction, as well as open meetings providing information for family, friends, and the public.
- Teen Challenge's provision of clothing changes.
- Helping Hands
- Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation's Community Mailbox Program
- John Howard Society
- SMART Recovery
- Family and Friends SMART Recovery

Community Education

We need to build a sense of community in response to the addictions crisis by tearing down the perception that it is someone else's problem. The truth is that this is our problem as a community. The community at large, community leaders, media, and community organizations need better education on addictions. We all need to understand that it is a disease with clear causes. These causes include trauma, co-occurring medical conditions, homelessness, poverty, and sex and gender².

Community Education can help to reduce stigma. People with addictions and their support systems want to have a better understanding of available services and resources. Not knowing how to navigate the system is a barrier to accessing treatment and other necessary supports. Further, front-line staff across public organizations and agencies need specialized training in

² Impacts of Methamphetamine Abuse in Canada, a report to Parliament by the Standing Committee on Health, submitted June, 2019. It can be found at, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/HESA/report-26/page-5>

order to be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to help people with addiction. Employers need information on how to better understand and support a potential employee that is trying to establish a brand new life for themselves.

Prevention is important. Participants want systems to be proactive, not reactive. More school based resources can help tackle root causes of addiction. Some examples are: more guidance counsellors, stronger efforts to fight against bullying, and opportunities to hear from local role models who have lived experience with addiction. Early mental health intervention, a strong community, recreation opportunities for all ages, and community education are also pieces of prevention.

Better Systems of Support for People with Addiction

People with addiction need to be treated with respect, acceptance, and compassion if they are going to be successful. A harm reduction approach and trauma-informed care are needed. This approach requires access to welcoming, safe spaces, whether someone is using and intoxicated or working through recovery. There should be ways to include personal supports – friends and family – in their care plan. Family and friends can help by working on maintaining a delicate balance between setting boundaries and staying connected. This means learning to be OK with giving people with addiction space when they need it and loving them where they are at.

More culturally appropriate addiction and mental health services is an integral part of the solution to Brandon's addictions crisis. Two major needs were identified by a number of participants. First is the need for medical detoxification beds that are appropriate for the addiction that people have. Second is the need for people who have lived experience with addictions to provide counselling and support, as well as help with navigating the complex addictions and mental health systems.

Broader treatment system changes were also raised, including:

- More front-line workers who have lived experience with addiction.
- Comprehensive, integrated programming that includes mobile services and a 24/7 Psychiatric Liaison Nurse.
- Better training for Family Doctors so they understand addiction and are prepared to take on patients that are either living with or recovering from addiction.
- A Community Mobilization HUB specific to addiction.
- Same day access to care based on the person's specific needs.
- Treatment options in home communities in addition to 12 Step options.
- Better counselling services.
- Support groups that are not connected to AFM.
- Rural communities need better access to clean needles, the RAAM Clinic, and other addictions supports.

Appointment reminders, as well as transportation to and from services are specific ways systems could better support successful treatment. Getting identification and keeping it safe is another problem people with addiction struggle with. Time for recovery and after treatment supports that are ongoing can also lead to success. These ongoing supports include:

- Housing:
 - More shelter for homeless people that is year-round
 - A sober house for women. An example of this is Destiny House, which is part of Two Ten Recovery in Winnipeg.
 - Sober and structured transitional housing.
 - More housing that is affordable to people coming out of recovery and starting to work.
- Employment and Financial Stability:
 - Mentorship programs for employment.
 - Volunteer opportunities are very important for many people trying to reintegrate into the workforce.
 - Financial recovery support including a Financial or Credit Counsellor.
- Social Integration:
 - Sober social opportunities to help with the feeling of isolation after treatment.
 - Opportunities to meet and get to know positive role models.
 - Identification of Sponsors that are not necessarily tied to a specific group.

Better Systems of Support for Families and Friends

Many people with addiction have family and friends that love them and want to do whatever they can to help their loved one be successful. They need opportunities to learn about addictions and new coping skills to help through challenging times. Tools such as intervention supports, more and varied support groups are needed. Friends and family would also benefit from peer support, from people with lived experience helping a loved one with addiction, to navigate the system.

What Can We Do?

WFA was born out of the need to support families dealing with the trauma of our addictions crisis. This report can lead to change, but only if we chose to act. Conversation participants identified a number of ways we can work to bring solutions to this problem:

- We can act as a community to advocate, lobby and represent.
- We can push for political leadership implementing proven strategies on recovery, instead of focusing on policing.
- We can ask for clear, concise, and measurable outcomes.
- We can coordinate with other groups in Manitoba to advocate for these solutions.
- We can bring key players to the table to educate, advocate, and act.