

Dear Dr. Smith,

The Interior Health Authority (IHA) has an urgent need for facility-based treatment beds for youth with primary Substance Use Disorders (SUDs), Alcohol Use Disorders or concurrent disorders. Although we have created Integrated Case Management (ICM) teams to help these youth there is still, and always will be, a need for facility-based treatment for a significant number of these youth.

Health outcomes for young people are improved when young people can receive treatment in their home community where they have access to their natural supports and can learn to resist local temptations and triggers. Unfortunately, there are currently no publicly funded treatment beds within the IHA for youth under the age of 17 years with these conditions.

As a result of the absence of local treatment beds, youth, who are wanting potentially life saving residential treatment, are often forced to wait weeks to months to access a higher level of care outside of their community. Many will relapse and therefore be at considerable risk of death while they wait. This is unacceptable.

There is existing capacity within the community social services sector in the IHA, and within Kelowna, to provide evidence-based, effective facility-based treatment services for young people. The Bridge is one member of this sector which has a plan to develop a 4-6 bed youth treatment program in the Central Okanagan. This organization can open and begin delivering services within 90 days of funding commitment using a previously licensed Bridge owned facility located near the hospital. There may be other service providers who are up to this challenge, as well.

Facility-based treatment is a critical component in the continuum of care for young people diagnosed with substance use disorder, alcohol use disorder, and/or concurrent disorders. The Department of Pediatrics at Kelowna General Hospital strongly urges the IHA to commit to providing an adequate number of facility-based treatment beds for youth with serious SUDs. The absence of this resource has contributed to lives being lost and more are likely to be lost, while we wait.

Thank you,
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