

# Local 196 SPOTLIGHT

## Impact of Safe Consumption Sites on Emergency Room Capacities

Recently, we have seen swift action by the UCP government to permanently close the remaining safe consumption sites across the province. The sites named to close or have already been shut down are located at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, Sheldon Chumar Health Centre in Calgary and the Overdose Prevention Site in Lethbridge. These evidence-based addiction care services have provided life-saving support and assisted in reducing emergency room presentations of unintentional overdoses.

Even though studies have proven the benefits outweigh the risks of accessible Safe Consumption Sites, the UCP government is implementing legislation that allows forced treatment and private, for-profit health options, rather than seeing what the public is facing in our crumbling health system. “Frontline workers say these experiences are symptoms of a large-scale issue that has been brewing for years, tied to inadequate staffing and resources, and a siloed system that is cracking under pressure.” (Hannah Alberga, The Canadian Press).

Removing these harm reduction sites will put an even larger strain on our health care system, which is currently in crisis with overcrowded emergency rooms and people leaving without being seen due to unbearable wait times. This impact not only affects our hospital doctors and nurses but also the EMS system responding to opioid-related events in the community, with Edmonton being responsible for 65% of the provincial total.



- Emergency Medicine physician in Medicine Hat, Dr. Paul Parks, describes our waiting rooms as “death zones”.
- Supervised consumption services reduce fatal overdoses, connect people to care, and decrease unnecessary ER visits

**Edmonton alone accounts for approximately 65 per cent of opioid-related EMS responses province-wide**

### References

- Alberga, H. (2026, January 23). Patients detail “disaster” inside Alberta emergency departments. The Canadian Press.
- Friends of Medicare. (2026, January 2). Supervised consumption site closures will lead to more harm reduction and busier emergency rooms. Friends of Medicare.