

Introduction

In collaboration with Foundry Centre's, Foundry Central Office's Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT) optimization project in 2023/24 provided key insights into improving substance use services for young people across British Columbia. This initiative explored innovative ways to enhance engagement, accessibility, and culturally responsive care for youth navigating substance use challenges. The learnings from this project will directly inform Foundry Central Office's 2025/26 Substance Use Work Plan, ensuring continued progress in peer support, harm reduction, and integrated service delivery.

Contributing Foundry Centres

- Foundry Prince George
- Foundry Kelowna
- Foundry Ridge Meadows
- Foundry Richmond
- Foundry Comox Valley
- Foundry Victoria
- Foundry Virtual BC

Key Learnings from OAT Optimization Project

Key learnings from the project includes themes of enhancing community driven, local and flexible services, including peer support and the ways of sharing stories. Particularly, empowering centres to determine funding use led to innovative and community-specific interventions that fit the individual needs of communities. Centres continued to emphasize the importance of supporting community-led initiatives for substance use services.

Peer Support

Youth peer support workers and substance use mentors played a critical role in engaging and retaining youth in OAT, offering lived experience perspectives and advocacy. This project demonstrated the value of youth peer support, and ways in which peer supporters and mentors can uniquely support substance use specific service offerings, including activities related to wellness, recreation and cultural connection.

Some examples include the following:

- Foundry Prince George successfully implemented a peer support position that incorporated Indigenous healing practices, bridging youth with multiple service systems.
- Foundry Comox Valley's in-school medical clinic demonstrated that physician efficiency increased fivefold when working alongside a youth peer support worker.

Virtual Services

Overall, hybrid care model (combining virtual and in-person care) required further assessment to enhance engagement and effectiveness. Within the scope of the project, building strong community pathways to OAT proved to be more effective than direct virtual OAT services.

To further incorporate this learning, future efforts may focus on improving integration between virtual and in-person support, particularly in remote locations such as Port Hardy.

Two-Eyed Seeing and Story Sharing

Finally, storytelling within the project was a valuable evaluation tool, allowing participants to reflect on their work and share insights beyond quantitative data.

Capturing narratives highlighted the complexity of substance use and the impact of peer support and outreach efforts.

Future Considerations

To sustain and build upon the progress made, Foundry Central Office has already taken several steps, including securing funding for youth peer support programs, expanding primary care capacity and FCO substance use pod, and continuing research on youth-centered OAT models. As the FCO Substance Use Service framework continues to be refined, it will reflect evidence informed practice and learnings from centres, including building on the outcomes from this project.

In order to continue to incorporate the OAT project outcomes into our approach to support youth who use substances across the Foundry network in the upcoming year, FCO will work on both service offerings and key resourcing opportunities. Promoting a shared understanding of an age- and stage-appropriate approaches, including harm reduction, within the Integrated Stepped care model is important in establishing integrated OAT service offerings and education offerings across the network.

Service Enhancement

1 Peer Support

2 Wellness Based Programming

3 Evidence-Based Tools

4 Resourcing Opportunities

Peer Support

The substance use pod will collaborate with the peer support pods to explore how to utilize peer supporters and individuals with lived experience to mentor and support youth who use substances. This includes how to better connect primary care and youth peer support when supporting young people who use substances as well as reviewing the learnings from substance use groups run at different Foundry Centres.

Examples of these groups include Smart Recovery (Foundry North Shore, Foundry Comox Valley), Harm Reduction Hub and the “Zine Group (Foundry Ridge Meadows), Sex + Drugs = Pizza (Foundry Sea to Sky), and Contingency Management (Foundry Vancouver Granville).

Wellness Based Programming

Supporting young folks who use substances to participate in recreation, and wellness-based programs that are accessible and meaningful supports young folks to increase connection. FCO will support this work through centre driven conversations, while sharing common barriers and successes to implementation of these types of services. As wellness in central to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, FCO Substance Use pod will partner with the Indigenous Wellness Team as well as Indigenous and Métis partner organizations to better integrate cultural ways of being and knowing into Foundry Substance Use programming. This includes incorporate these teachings into Foundry's substance use and harm reduction models of care.

Evidence-Based Tools

Enhancing our use of evidence-based tools and FCO education offerings, all current education and training offerings will be reviewed to include story-based case studies and discussions related to youth curious about substances or using substances. Particularly relevant will be to incorporate lived and living experience perspectives into training modules to enhance understanding and application of youth substance use, and the impact of low barrier, comprehensive access to care providers, harm reduction and treatment options, and youth focused programming.

Resourcing opportunities

The FCO Substance Use pod will continue to seek and advocate for human and financial resources that align with and support the OAT project learnings. These include:

- Funding for specialized OAT training for nurses to increase provider capacity and improve youth access to care.
- Sustained support for youth peer support roles, wellness programs, and cultural initiatives, recognizing their effectiveness in engaging and retaining youth in services.
- Explore and define roles and responsibilities for outreach and mentorship to support young people transitioning from acute care or homelessness into community-based care

Conclusion

The OAT optimization project underscores the importance of youth-centered, flexible, and culturally responsive substance use care. By expanding peer support, increasing access to evidence-based tools, and strengthening harm reduction approaches, Foundry is committed to ensuring that young people across BC have access to the care they need. Through continued collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to learning, Foundry will help create a system where youth feel supported, empowered, and connected on their journey toward wellness.

We are looking forward to sharing more in the coming year with respect to our next steps to support and enhance substance use support at centres, and are grateful for the learnings through this project to ground us as we plan and innovate.

