CBC

Province to hold meeting to address gaps in services related to crystal meth

Those fighting addictions say the approach needs to be different from existing programs

Holly Caruk · CBC News · Posted: Feb 13, 2018 4:00 AM CT | Last Updated: February 13



Over 60 people from various government departments and community organizations have been invited to a meeting to discuss gaps in services when it comes to battling the growing crystal meth problem.

The Manitoba government has invited several organizations and stakeholder groups to take part in a meeting Wednesday to begin developing a plan to address the growing methamphetamine use in Winnipeg.

"The goal will be to identify areas of impact and importance such as crisis and emergency department services, front-line staff training, public awareness and education, prevention and

harm reduction, withdrawal management and stabilization, and mental health and addiction treatment services," a provincial spokesperson said in an email.

More than 60 people have been invited, including representatives from Manitoba Health, Justice, Families, and Healthy Child Manitoba.

- **Meth spike worrying, straining Winnipeg's emergency responders**
- **Winnipeg: A city wide awake on crystal meth**
- **Meth use 'like a tidal wave' in Winnipeg, says head of family centre**

The meeting, which is not open to the public or media, will also include individuals who work in the health system, law enforcement, Indigenous organizations, and community-based agencies.

"This should have happened a year ago," said Marion Willis — executive director of St. Boniface Street Links, a non-profit organization that provides shelter and access to supports for those seeking addictions treatments — who will attend Wednesday's meeting.

"I think that we've been kind of screaming from the rooftops for at least a year trying to draw attention to the fact that the meth use in the city had really escalated," said Willis.

Willis says the meeting is just the first step of many toward finding solutions to what she describes as reaching "crisis proportions."



Marion Willis, director of St. Boniface Street Links, says she hopes to see a concrete and actionable plan come form the meeting. (Holly Caruk/CBC)

Willis says she's hopeful the meeting will generate concrete plans that can be put into action and "get a strategy in place, one that can be implemented, even if it has to be implemented in phases," she said.

"The time is now to act and it's encouraging to know that that's what we're going to do."

Similar planning is also underway by the Prairie Mountain Health to address gaps in Brandon and the rest of the region.

Addicts say approach needs to be tailored to meth users

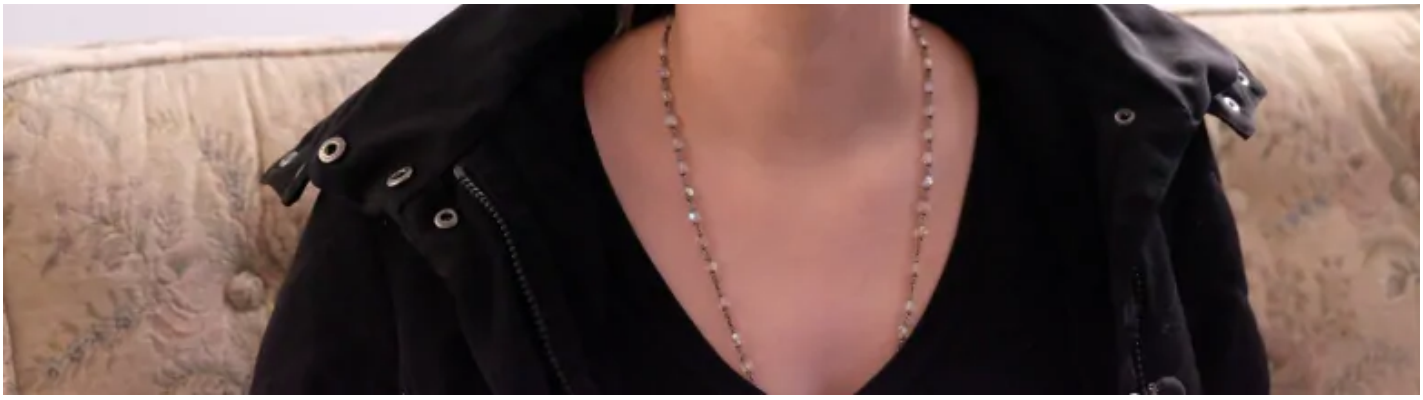
CBC News spoke with people who have used crystal methamphetamine. They said the approach to fighting addiction needs to change in order to successfully fight the growing meth problem in Manitoba.

"They need more supports out there, more resources ... they don't have enough targeted just for the crystal meth users,"said 33-year-old Ashley Grant.

"Crystal meth is quite a bit different than the other narcotics, it's its own problem," she said.

"It rewires your whole brain, it makes you something else."





Ashley Grant says she was never able to stay clean until she had stable housing and the support of counselors and mental health professionals. (Holly Caruk/CBC)

Grant had been using meth on and off for 16 years. She was homeless, living under the Provencher Bridge and using meth daily, when she found St. Boniface Street Links.

She says one of the main obstacles to her sobriety was being homeless, explaining she used meth to stay awake so she could handle life on the streets.

"If you go to sleep you're vulnerable, you don't know who can attack you, who can rob you, what's going to happen."

She says having a safe place to live was key to getting off meth.

"I didn't have to use [meth] for survival anymore," she said.

> "Trying to get addictions services, it took months before anyone would even see me."
>
> *- Ashley Grant*

Now clean for over six months, Grant says traditional detox programs didn't work for her, and she didn't feel comfortable in group therapy settings, like narcotics anonymous.

She detoxed herself, but had problems accessing follow up support.

"Trying to get addictions services, it took months before anyone would even see me," she said.

Grant said getting treatment for her mental health issues and finding safe housing was crucial to help her address some of the reasons she turned to the drug in the first place.

"I've got support workers now, but I've had to fight on my own to get all of that. If you don't know where to go or how to get there, you're on your own, you're just going to fall," said Grant.

Willis agrees, she says the approach that has been used in the past needs to evolve to fit a new set of challenges.

"We can't rely on the same 12 step programs, the same residential care treatment programs that we have in the past, this requires something different," she said.

Housing and support critical to getting clean, addict says

Paul Miscavish struggled with addiction for most of his life, first cocaine and heroin, then alcohol; about a year and a half ago the 54-year-old turned to meth.

"It wrecks lives, it destroyed my life, I'll never recover. I can never recover what I've lost in relationships," said Miscavish.

He says the biggest step toward battling addiction is proper housing and getting the support of counselors.

- **Longer detox stays, safe consumption sites among options being considered in response to meth use: AFM**
- **Former meth user says jail, long-term treatment helped her fight addiction**

"They need programs where they've got counselors," he said.

"They need housing, people don't have places to live that's why a lot of these people are going to the drugs."

Miscavish says simply adding more detox bed won't work.

"People are going into detox ... just to rest and eat, and they are back out on the street after ten days doing it again," he said.





Paul Miscavish struggled with addictions most of his life, he says meth is a dangerous drug and wants to see more supports available to help people get clean. (Holly Caruk/CBC)

Miscavish said having a place to live and being in a supportive environment is the only thing helping him turn his life around, though he admits relapsing just a couple weeks ago.

"If you have a nice place to live, you start to see you can have nice things, you don't want to go waste your life on drugs and alcohol because you're starting to get yourself together by having a house," he said.

Meth is 'one of the worst drugs on the market'

Miscavish says meth is available everywhere and easy to get. The high is long, and the cost is low.

"People are buying it because it's cheap," he said.

"It's very bad, it's almost one of the worst drugs on the market besides fentanyl and oxycontin."

Miscavish says he plans on entering a detox program soon, but knows it'll take more than that to stay clean.

He says any plan the province wants to implement needs to focus on supports, and address the reasons people turn to substances in the first place, things like mental health issues, poverty, and homelessness.

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