

An illustration on the left side of the page depicts three individuals in a clinical or hospital environment. At the top, a person with dark hair, wearing a black tank top and light blue pants, sits on a white surface, looking upwards with a smile. Below them, a person with dark hair and a mustache, wearing an orange patterned shirt, sits in a white hospital bed, resting their chin on their hand with a thoughtful expression. At the bottom, a person with dark curly hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, sits in a white wheelchair, holding a white smartphone. The background features large, stylized, overlapping shapes in blue and orange, along with several white arrow-like shapes pointing right.

# In-Patient Treatment for Substance Use in Canada



Canadian Centre  
on Substance Use  
and Addiction

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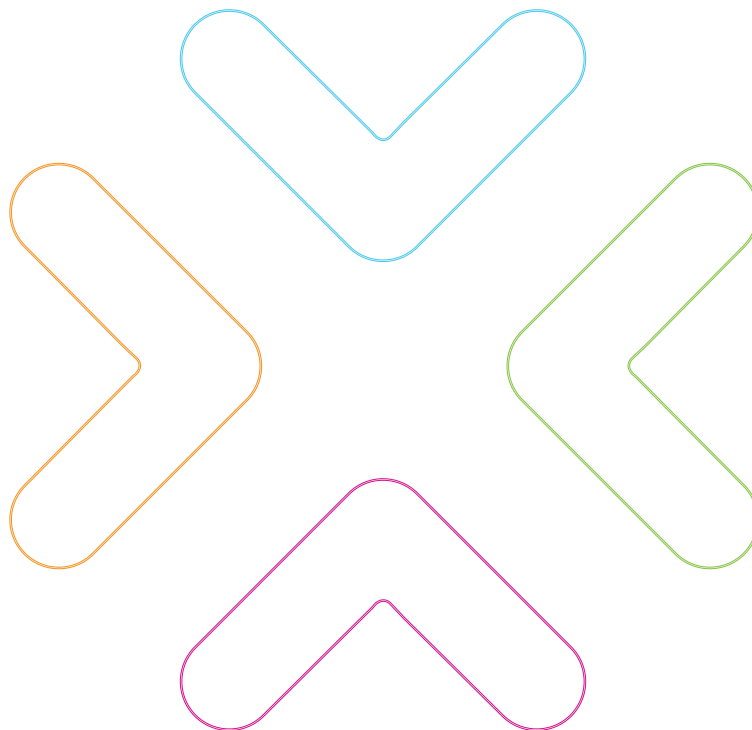
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## Introduction

This guide is for people in Canada who are considering an in-patient treatment program for substance use. Generally, in-patient treatment programs offer structured live-in settings of various lengths. They provide health and social services and supports for people who want to change behaviours related to their substance use and improve their overall health and well-being (Fraser Health, n.d.). In-patient treatment programs are also referred to as “residential treatment,” “rehabilitation centres,” “rehab centres” or “bed-based treatment.”

In-patient treatment programs are part of the available services and supports for people who want to change certain behaviours related to substance use or who have received a diagnosis of substance use disorder. In-patient treatment is not for everyone. People who are considering it may need to adjust their expectations based on what is available to them.

Everyone’s goals and paths to well-being are different. Outpatient treatment programs, including individual counselling, support groups and medication, are evidence-informed services that are part of the spectrum of care. Compared to in-patient treatment, these services may be more readily available (for example, virtual care), affordable and better suited to some people’s situations. Outpatient treatment programs can also support people while they are waiting for an in-patient treatment program. Some form of outpatient treatment service or support should be considered while waiting for an in-patient treatment program.

Finding an in-patient treatment program that meets personal needs and expectations may take time. This guide provides an overview of the types of services and supports commonly available at in-patient treatment programs across Canada and what can be expected. It includes things to think about for those who are considering a treatment program. It also includes questions they might want to ask service providers or referral service staff in their area to make the best-informed decisions for their health.

**Substance use disorder** is a medical condition characterized by continued use of substances despite negative impacts on many domains of a person’s life, including physical health, family and social relationships (Government of Canada, 2023).

**Outpatient treatment programs** are generally community-based services that allow for flexibility. They may include medication, individual or group counselling, case management, psychotherapy, health education, harm reduction services and other supports.





## Deciding to Go to an In-Patient Treatment Program

Many factors can contribute to a person's decision to go to an in-patient treatment program, which program they choose, and when. There are different paths to well-being. In-patient treatment is only one of many treatment options available for substance use and may not be the right choice for everyone.

It can be helpful to discuss goals with a trusted service provider, such as a family doctor, registered nurse, social worker, harm reduction worker, or counsellor who specializes in supporting people with substance use or mental health concerns. Local community health centres can provide additional information for people who need help connecting with service providers.

### Personal Considerations

A person's situation, including practicalities like their finances, location (for example, urban, rural, or remote), values, goals, life circumstances, priorities and preferences will affect their decision to go to in-patient treatment. For example, if they have a substance use disorder and are experiencing a mental illness, they may prefer an in-patient treatment program that specializes in concurrent disorder care. Other examples include specialized care related to sex, gender, cultural practices, spiritual practices, and dietary preferences.

Depending on their priorities, someone who is exploring treatment centre options may also want to consider the expertise and qualifications of the treatment centre staff members, their knowledge of trauma- and violence-informed care, cultural safety, care for people with disabilities, concurrent disorders, staff-to-client ratio, and treatment centre accreditation.

**Concurrent disorder** is a term that is used when a person has both a mental health and substance use disorder at the same time (BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, n.d. -a).

**Accreditation** refers to a treatment program that has satisfied a specific set of criteria and has been evaluated by an accrediting body.



## Cost

Cost can be one of the most important things to consider before choosing an in-patient program.

- Canada has both publicly and privately funded in-patient treatment programs.
  - The cost of publicly funded programs is covered by social assistance in most — but not all — provinces and territories. Publicly funded programs may not be available in all areas. A trusted service provider may be able to provide more information about social assistance availability and how to apply.
  - In comparison, privately funded in-patient treatment programs can be expensive.
- Quality of care is available in both publicly and privately funded treatment centres and may be affected by many different factors. It's important that individuals know what resources and services are important to them.
- People may have insurance through their employer to cover a certain percentage of the cost of an in-patient treatment program. There may be specific requirements around this, so it's important that people check with their insurance benefits provider first.
- People can also opt to pay out-of-pocket for all or some services.
- It's important that people who are exploring treatment programs ask about costs and what services and supports are included in the price.
- Health Canada funds the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP), which supports in-patient treatment services for First Nations people and Inuit across Canada (Government of Canada, n.d.). Local in-patient treatment centres may be able to provide more information about this program.

### I can also ask about:

- What is included in the treatment program fee?
- Do some services cost extra? For example, is a private room more expensive than a shared room?
- What is the treatment program's policies on payment and refunds?
- Under what circumstance are refunds issued?
- Will I get a refund if I do not complete the whole program or choose to leave?
- What happens to my payment if I am discharged from the program?

## Time Commitment

How long a person stays in an in-patient treatment program will depend on the program and their needs. Most are live-in programs that are at least 21 consecutive days. It's important that individuals think about how it will affect their life and the lives of the people around them.

### I'll need to think about:

- Who will take care of my kids and pets while I'm away?
- How much time can I take off work to go to a program?



## Location

In-patient treatment programs are not equally distributed across provinces and territories. It may be necessary to travel to another province or territory for an in-patient treatment centre to best meet personal needs.

### I'll ask:

- What in-patient treatment programs are offered in my area?
- If I find a program outside my area, is travel covered by insurance benefits or social assistance?
- Are there travel restrictions I may need to think about?

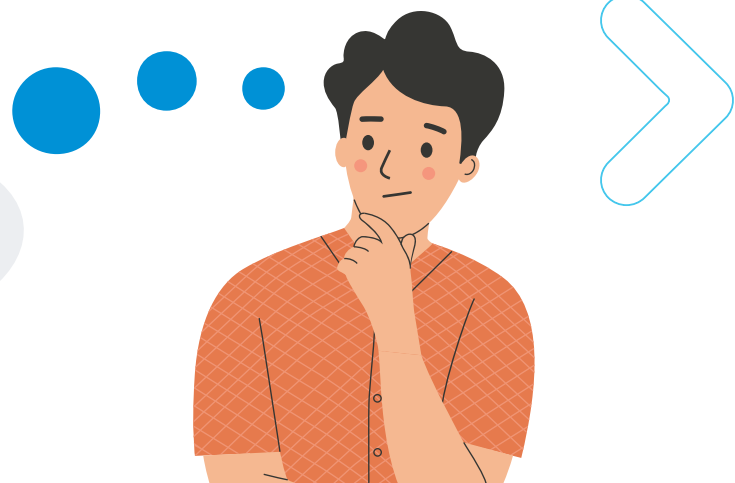


## Availability

The time it takes to get into an in-patient treatment program can vary and depends on the type of program, services offered, location, cost and other factors. Often, it's not possible to get in right away, and people may be placed on a waiting list. It can be helpful to apply to more than one in-patient treatment program.

### I'll need to think about:

- What other programs (for example, outpatient programs) are offered in my area or virtually that I can access while waiting for a bed?
- When can I start the treatment program?
- Can I extend my stay if I need or want to?





## Managing Withdrawal Symptoms

- Before entering an in-patient treatment program, individuals may be asked to go to a withdrawal management program, a stabilization program, or both.
- Withdrawal management services, often referred to as “detox,” are medical and psychosocial supports that help manage the physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms people can experience after stopping the use of substances. These symptoms can include pain, nausea, insomnia and anxiety.
- Stabilization services offer medical, psychosocial and life-skills support for people experiencing withdrawal, psychiatric symptoms, or both. They help prepare individuals for the transition to in-patient treatment. For example, a person may see an addiction medicine doctor or nurse practitioner during stabilization to discuss medications for substance use disorder (for example, buprenorphine) and mental health concerns if applicable.
- Some people may go to an in-patient treatment program that offers withdrawal management and stabilization services and others may go to a community withdrawal management service. The program duration varies from person to person and program to program.
- Some people may have to manage their withdrawal at home. The length and severity of withdrawal will vary for everyone and may depend on a variety of factors, including the type of substance consumed and the quantity. It can be helpful to have a trusted support person to support them throughout this process. They may take medication to help with some symptoms. To discuss medication, they can consider connecting with a prescriber.
- It is high risk to suddenly stop using certain substances like opioids, benzodiazepines, and alcohol. Someone who has done this could experience serious negative health consequences, including recurrence (also referred to as “relapse”) and death. It is important to have support in place in the event of recurrence. There are also some medications that can help reduce these risks; see Prescription and Nonprescription Medications on page 10.



### I'll be sure to ask:

- Is withdrawal management required, and is it part of the treatment program?
- What can I expect going through the withdrawal management process?
- Can I go directly from withdrawal management to treatment?
- Is the withdrawal management program covered by my insurance?
- What kind of support is available to me if I go to a community withdrawal management program?
- If I need to go through withdrawal at home, who can I call on for support?

## Discharge and Aftercare

- It's never too early for someone to start thinking about the services and support they may need after completing and being discharged from an in-patient treatment program. The program you go to will help you develop a plan for after your stay.
- Some in-patient treatment programs offer aftercare services and support to best support people on their health and well-being journeys.
- A person may choose to return to the same or a different in-patient treatment program throughout their well-being journey. This all depends on their needs and experiences.
- Some people leave a treatment centre earlier than they planned. That's why it's always important to maintain connections with support systems outside the treatment centre in the event that this happens.
- Many people return to treatment more than once. They may want to try different approaches to find the one that best meets their needs at the time.

### I'll ask:

- Is aftercare support offered?
- If yes, what type of support and how long is it available for?
- How can I continue to care for myself after treatment?



## Recurrence

- Recurrence is part of the well-being journey. It refers to using substances after a period of not using them. It may also be called “relapse” or a “slip” (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, n.d. -b).
- Recurrence may happen while a person is at an in-patient treatment program or after they’ve completed the program. If they use substances after a period of not using them, it can result in many potential harms, some of which can be life-threatening. Losing drug tolerance can significantly increase their chance of a fatal drug poisoning (also known as fatal drug overdose). Staying connected to their support system and having naloxone readily available if opioids are used are ways to reduce some of those risks.
- Policies on recurrence and available supports will vary depending on the in-patient treatment centre.





## Approaches to Care

In-patient treatment programs and their approaches to care vary. Most treatment programs will develop individual care plans to best accommodate each person's unique needs.

Typically, in-patient treatment programs offer a combination of individual counselling sessions, group therapy, support groups, life skills, education, and recreational activities. Some treatment programs may use a combination of approaches. People who are exploring treatment options might consider speaking with a trusted service provider about what is most suitable for them. Service providers can assist in finding the treatment program that provides the right mix of services and supports to best match specific needs.

Some other examples of frequently used approaches to care within an in-patient treatment program setting are described below.

### Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

This is a form of psychotherapy where a person talks to a professional about their personal challenges to understand how their thoughts affect the way they feel and act. This therapy can help develop coping skills and strategies to manage stressful situations. It's structured, goal-oriented and short-term (typically, 6–12 sessions) (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2023).

### Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT)

This is a form of psychotherapy where a person talks to a professional about their challenges and learns skills to help them cope. It's based on CBT, but it focuses more on the emotional and social aspects of living, including personal and interpersonal skills. It's long-term (typically one year) (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, n.d. -a).

### Harm Reduction

This is a practical public health approach that includes prevention, risk reduction and health promotion. Harm reduction focuses on the experience of someone who has lived or living experience of substance use. For example, a harm reduction approach that in-patient treatment centres may offer can include a naloxone response to drug poisoning (also known as drug overdose) (Toward the Heart, BC Centre for Disease Control, n.d.).

### Indigenous Programs

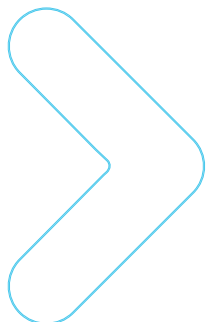
First Nations, Métis and Inuit healing centres and programs offer culturally safe services and supports that use healing practices distinct to their specific cultures and languages, Western approaches, or both to support health and well-being (Government of Ontario, n.d.).

### Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART)

SMART meetings are structured groups led by a trained facilitator. SMART is designed to help people build and maintain motivation to change, cope with cravings, manage thoughts and emotions without substances, and live a balanced and healthy life (SMART Recovery, n.d.).

### 12-Step Programs

These abstinence-based programs can help people stop using substances through behavioural changes and peer support.





## How to Prepare for an In-Patient Treatment Program Stay

If a person has decided that an in-patient treatment program is the right choice for them, what should they do to prepare? Here are some things they should consider as they plan their stay.

### Paperwork

There may be a need to complete paperwork for more than one in-patient treatment program. As a person prepares for their stay, the paperwork can be overwhelming. A trusted support person may be able to help. The more people they have in their circle of support, the better.

They may need:

- A referral from a healthcare professional to be admitted to the in-patient treatment program. They should ask about the referral process and forms that their healthcare professional needs to complete for them.
- Their provincial or territorial health card.
- Information about insurance coverage, proof of income (for example, social assistance), or both.

### Health Assessment

Before entering an in-patient treatment program, individuals will likely have to see a family doctor or nurse practitioner to complete a health assessment.

A health assessment ensures there are no medical concerns that would interfere with their participation in the program. If they have any pre-existing medical conditions, such as diabetes, that require management, medication, or both, they should discuss it with their healthcare provider.

### Prescription and Nonprescription Medications

If a person is taking prescription medication, including controlled substances such as methadone or suboxone, they should ask the in-patient treatment staff about their specific policies on prescribed medication use during treatment and how this will be managed while they're there. Staff should also be informed about any nonprescription medication they are taking, such as supplements or vitamins.

If a person is receiving opioid agonist treatment (OAT), taking any medications for mental health or taking other controlled substances (for example, benzodiazepines, stimulants), it is important that they ask about the treatment centre's policies on those medications and ensure they will be available to them during their stay. Some treatment centres may not allow certain medications or controlled substances, even if they are prescribed. Individuals should consider a treatment centre that will accommodate the medications that they are taking (for example, OAT).

**Opioid agonist treatment (OAT)** involves taking medications to treat opioid use disorder and reduce substance-related harms (BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, n.d. -b).

### Personal Belongings While in Treatment

Since every in-patient treatment program is different, rules about personal belongings will vary. Personal belongings can include electronics, certain clothing, reading materials and cash. It's important to ask the in-patient treatment staff about what items are allowed to ensure there are no surprises on arrival. Some in-patient treatment programs do not allow cell phones. If this is the case, individuals can ask program staff about how they can contact people during their stay if or when they need to do so.

## Smoking

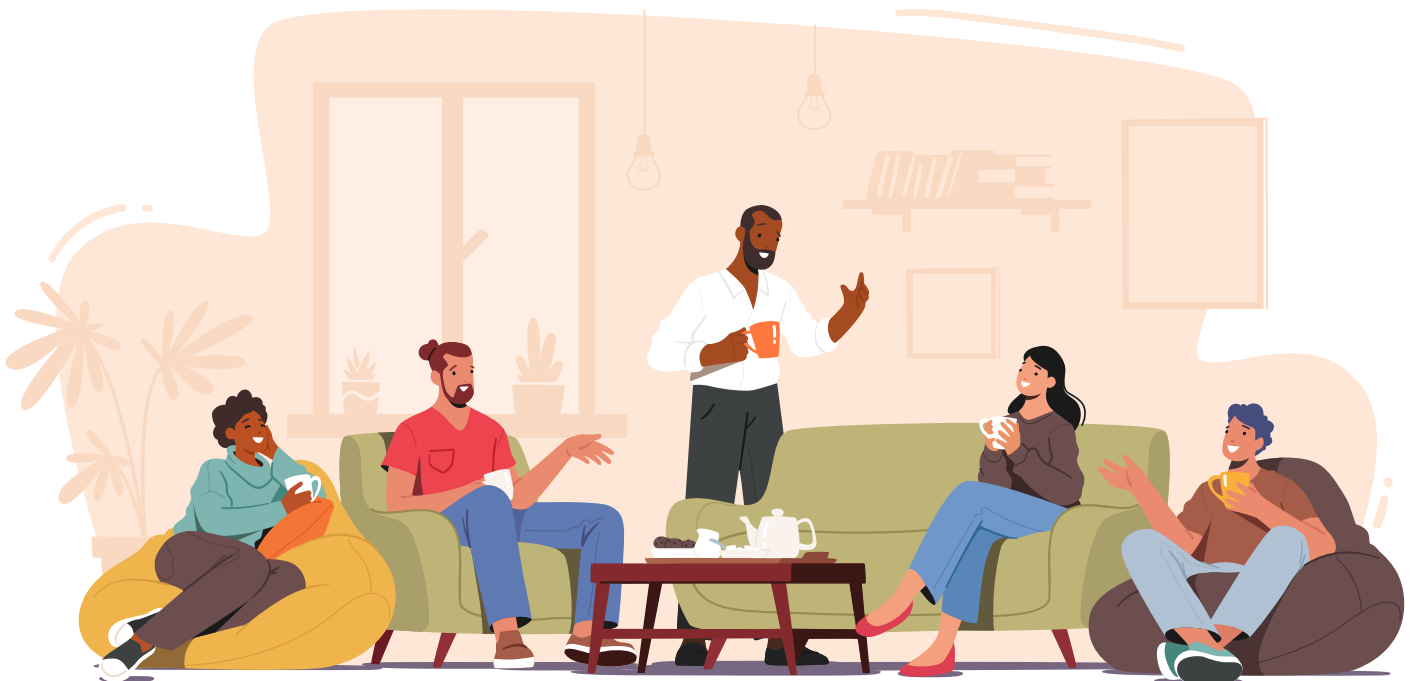
Many in-patient treatment programs are smoke-free — but not all. Some in-patient treatment programs offer nicotine replacement treatment. A person who smokes and who is entering a treatment program should ask about the program's policies and rules on smoking.

## Visitors

Family and friends can be a very helpful and important source of support in a well-being journey. Most in-patient treatment programs will have visiting hours for family and friends. Some in-patient treatment programs may allow visitors outside of designated visiting hours. Other programs may allow individuals to leave the centre for a period, for example, for a special celebration or during designated periods. Treatment program visitation policies vary.

## Additional Questions to Consider Asking

- What kind of accreditation does the in-patient treatment facility have?
- What qualifications do the staff working at the in-patient treatment centre have? What is the ratio of staff members to clients?
- How much one-on-one time is there with a counsellor while there? How much time is spent in groups?
- Is it possible to speak to someone who has been through the in-patient treatment program about their experiences?
- How is success measured for people who go through the in-patient treatment program?
- How much privacy is allowed during a person's stay?
- What does a typical day at this in-patient treatment facility look like?
- Are there any programs or supports for family of people in the program?





## Conclusion

This document is intended to support decision-making for people considering an in-patient treatment program for substance use.

In-patient treatment programs are one of many service options available to people with substance use concerns in Canada and are not necessarily the best option for everyone.

There are considerable differences in how in-patient treatment programs are offered and delivered in different provinces or territories across Canada. Community health centres, central referral services, public health units or service providers can provide more information on services and supports for substance use, including information on in-patient treatment programs.

For immediate, free, confidential help for mental health and substance use that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, visit the Government of Canada's website [Get Help Here](#).

For more information, visit the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction website at [ccsa.ca](https://ccsa.ca).





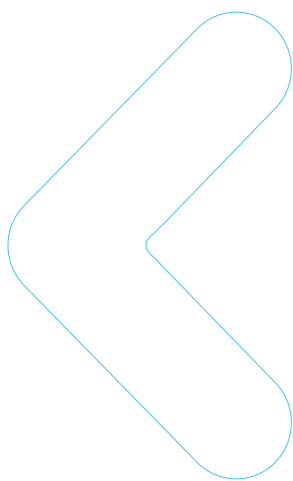
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