



## ALBERTA ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

### **Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police announces position on decriminalization**

Today, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023, a panel of delegates will be addressing the issue of decriminalization at the [Alberta Recovery Conference](#). The panel will also present a research paper commissioned by the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police entitled: *Decriminalization: Why a Whole-of-System Approach is Crucial to Improving Community Safety and Wellbeing Outcomes (LINK)*. The peer-reviewed paper establishes an evidence-based approach to decriminalization in Alberta.

The Alberta Recovery Conference brings together leading international researchers, clinicians and policy makers, all striving towards a collaborative solution for dealing with the complex social issues of mental health and addictions. There has never been a more important time for us to take enhanced actions to address addiction, mental health, homelessness and public-safety issues.

Based on research, the AACP believes what is most clear, is that advancing a decriminalization strategy in Alberta today would be incredibly premature. Instead, a systemic and ordered approach, that prioritizes community safety must be in place before decriminalization can be considered.

The actions required to address our community health crisis must come from a whole-system lens and requires a robust framework of supports to effect change to complex, interconnected problems. The AACP Roadmap to Community Well-being, as outlined in the attached infographic, is going to look slightly different for each municipality.

“We understand sweeping harm-reduction policies may present additional challenges in rural areas and we are committed to working collaboratively with our communities across the province to find solutions that work for them,” says AACP President Mark Neufeld. “But what can’t be different, is the commitment that social agencies, health providers and the judicial system make to solving this wickedly complex issue together. Success will only be fully realized when we truly come together for the greater good of our communities.”

“Balancing the needs of the individual, with the needs of the community is no easy task. Peoples lives and livelihoods are at stake and we have to get this right.”

Edmonton Police Service Chief Dale McFee says, “There is an addictions crisis in our communities but there is no single, standalone fix. We have to stop trying to adhoc our way out of this crisis by rushing to ideas like decriminalization which will actually exacerbate challenges. Our report shows that only a coordinated, integrated and tightly connected suite of services within an entire ecosystem can truly help us meet this challenge. It’s an all-hands-on-deck approach to a terribly intractable problem and I am hopeful that we will move in this direction.”

The research, led by the Community Safety Knowledge Alliance, was peer-reviewed by six professionals who work in psychology, addiction and mental health, criminology and the judicial system. Dr. Onawa LaBelle, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Windsor had this to say about the research.

“As a recovery researcher with lived experience of addiction and recovery, I can attest that the research paper commissioned by the AACP is thorough, thoughtful, and provides valuable insight into the complexities of decriminalization. The paper outlines an evidence-based approach for a roadmap to community well-being that considers not just the individual, but the community they inhabit, emphasizing the need for collaboration between social agencies, health providers, and the judicial system. This collaborative approach is critical to addressing the multifaceted and interconnected issues related to addiction and decriminalization. As someone who has struggled with addiction, I understand the importance of taking a holistic approach to recover and complex social issues. The insights and recommendations provided in this paper are invaluable to researchers, policymakers, and community stakeholders alike.”

The report and the AACP Roadmap to Community Well-being infographic are available on the AACP website [aacp.ca](http://aacp.ca).

### **Media Inquiries**

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