
Housing, Addictions and Homelessness

Meeting with Minister Bernadette Smith

May 4, 2026



Association of
Manitoba Municipalities

Summary of Municipal Priorities

The AMM appreciates the opportunity to meet with Minister Bernadette Smith and representatives of Manitoba Housing, Addictions and Homelessness. The AMM encourages the provincial government to consider municipal concerns as well as the effects of funding decisions on local communities throughout the budget process. This document outlines the AMM's position and recommendations on a number of important municipal issues relevant to Minister Smith's portfolio. The AMM looks forward to working with the Province to strengthen provincial-municipal growth and partnership opportunities.

1. Sharps Disposal and Collection

Recommendation:

- ✓ *Collaborate with municipalities and the AMM to strengthen coordination of sharps disposal, provide ongoing funding for cleanup initiatives, and enhance public safety.*

2. Patient Transfers under *The Mental Health Act*

Recommendation:

- ✓ *Expedite the review of *The Mental Health Act* and expand the transfer hub system across the province to reduce costs and the burden on police transporting individuals.*

Sharps Disposal and Collection

Recommendation:

- ✓ ***Collaborate with municipalities and the AMM to strengthen coordination of sharps disposal, provide ongoing funding for cleanup initiatives, and enhance public safety.***

In 2024, our members passed a resolution raising urgent concerns about public safety and the safe distribution and disposal of hazardous materials. While these challenges have been particularly acute in the Parkland and northern Manitoba, improperly discarded sharps pose a serious threat to communities throughout the province. In the Town of Swan River, for example, a community of just 4,000 residents reported the distribution of more than 500,000 needles. Without a coordinated disposal plan, the result was havoc for this small community, with used needles left on streets, in parks, and even on playgrounds. This created a significant public safety risk and underscored the lack of provincial support for a safe, coordinated approach to sharps collection and disposal.

For municipalities already facing considerable financial pressures, the additional responsibility of managing discarded needles has created an unsustainable burden. Local services such as policing, community cleanups, and staff time are being diverted from critical priorities to address an issue that requires provincial leadership and resources. While we welcomed direct ministerial visits to Swan Valley area to witness the problem firsthand, progress depends on adequate funding and provincial coordination.

AMM acknowledges the Province's initial steps in response to municipal concerns, including directing regional health authorities to incorporate needle cleanup into harm reduction programming and providing \$30,000 to each of the four regional health authorities outside Winnipeg to develop local disposal and cleanup plans. The introduction of public disposal containers, cleanup teams, and regionally tailored approaches reflects a positive recognition that a one-size-fits-all strategy will not work across Manitoba's diverse communities.

However, municipalities remain concerned about the lack of visible progress since these measures were introduced. Feedback from municipal representatives at the Harm Reduction Plan Committee indicates ongoing gaps, including the absence of a comprehensive harm reduction plan and continued challenges with needle distribution, collection, and visibility in communities. AMM is seeking an update on these initiatives, including next steps, as well as clarity on the Province's broader plan to expand mental health and addiction supports. While current investments are appreciated, escalating challenges across Manitoba underscore the need for provincial action to support recovery, protect public safety, and relieve municipalities of responsibilities beyond their mandate and capacity.

Patient Transfers under *The Mental Health Act*

Recommendation:

- ✓ ***Expedite the review of *The Mental Health Act* and expand the transfer hub system across the province to reduce costs and the burden on police transporting individuals.***

Manitoba municipalities are experiencing a significant rise in mental health-related calls to police and fire services, diverting critical resources away from core public safety priorities. Increasing rates of homelessness, addictions, and mental health challenges have placed growing pressure on police, who are routinely responding to crises beyond their traditional role. Data from Manitoba RCMP shows that from 2022 to 2024, officers spent an average of 659 hours per month waiting with patients or escorting them to hospitals or mental health facilities – an unsustainable demand on frontline resources.

This trend underscores the urgent need for dedicated mental health supports to reduce reliance on police as first responders. While the Province committed to a comprehensive review of *The Mental Health Act* nearly three years ago, progress has been limited, and the current model remains both unsustainable and inefficient. While *The Mental Health Amendment Act* allows a ‘qualified person’ to assume custody of individuals awaiting assessment, police continue to serve as the default response. In many cases, officers are spending entire shifts on patient supervision and transport, reducing patrol capacity and community visibility. Reports of officers waiting in hospitals for extended periods – including instances exceeding 50 hours due to a lack of available beds – have resulted in significant overtime costs for municipalities and further strained local resources. Therefore, we urge the Province to expedite its review of the Act, remove the expectation that RCMP serve as the default response for patient transport, and invest in dedicated mental health transportation alternatives.

AMM also continues to advocate for the expansion of Institutional Safety Officers (ISOs) across Manitoba hospitals. The Province’s past pilot project with Long Plain First Nation, employing First Nation Safety Officers at Portage District General Hospital, demonstrates a model that could be replicated province-wide. Collaboration with Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care on this initiative could relieve police from hospital monitoring duties and allow them to refocus on community safety.

We also recognize the Province’s implementation of a transfer hub system, enabling qualified personnel to assume custody at designated locations. Expanding this model across the province would further reduce pressures on law enforcement while ensuring individuals in crisis receive timely, appropriate care. Ultimately, Manitoba requires a more coordinated and adequately resourced mental health response system – one that supports those in crisis while allowing police services to focus on their core public safety responsibilities.

Active AMM Resolutions

AMM Resolution #15-2025: Updating and Modernizing *The Mental Health Act*

Sponsor(s)

Dauphin, City (Parkland)

Elton, RM (Western)

Thompson, City (Northern)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to undertake a comprehensive review and modernization of *The Mental Health Act*, in consultation with municipalities, law enforcement agencies, health authorities, and Indigenous leadership; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba for the following legislative and operational improvements:

1. Establish and fund Mobile Crisis Response Teams across Manitoba, staffed by trained mental health professionals and/or paramedics to respond to non-violent mental health emergencies, reducing the need for police intervention.
2. Develop a province-wide mental health patient transportation service that can be deployed in place of police officers for non-criminal, health-based apprehensions and transfers.
3. Limit the requirement for police officers to remain at health facilities with individuals in custody, once the facility has assumed care and no public safety risk exists.
4. Enable the use of virtual psychiatric assessments (telepsychiatry) as a mandatory step prior to transporting individuals – particularly youth – from rural and northern communities to urban psychiatric facilities, to ensure that hospitalization is clinically necessary and to reduce avoidable transfers.
5. Create and/or expand regional Crisis Stabilization Units (CSUs) where individuals can be taken for assessment and care outside of emergency departments, helping to divert non-emergent cases from hospitals.
6. Expand mental health support programs in rural and northern communities, ensuring access to timely assessment and care without overreliance on RCMP transport.
7. Invest in community-based supports and preventive mental health services to reduce the number of crisis interventions required; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Province works with all partners to ensure legislative changes are accompanied by appropriate funding, training, and infrastructure development, so municipalities are not left to shoulder additional costs or responsibilities alone.

AMM Resolution #14-2024: Sharps Collection

Sponsor(s)

The Pas, Town (Northern)
Swan River, Town (Parkland)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba and Shared Health to enhance their efforts in managing the distribution and disposal of needles in communities by:

- Providing adequate resources and support for the establishment of community collection points for the safe disposal of sharps/needles;
- Implementing educational programs to raise awareness about safe needle disposal practices among residents, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders;
- Reviewing the regional health authorities' current distribution practices of needles to ensure responsible and safe distribution, including monitoring and tracking of distributed needles;
- Complete collaboration process with local authorities and community organizations prior to implementing harm reduction strategies within the community, prioritizing prevention and recovery; and
- Promoting the use of single-use retractable needles and implementing a needle exchange program across the Province of Manitoba to improve safety; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to conduct a study and provide measurable data on the effectiveness of harm reduction programs, confirming the total funds allocated and the relative success of these programs in relation to their costs.

AMM Resolution #48-2023: Mental Health Transfers – SP

Sponsor(s)

Russell-Binscarth, Municipality (Midwestern)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to put in place the required people with the appropriate training in all District Hospitals that are authorized to take and detain individuals under The Mental Health Act in order to free up peace officers and members of the RCMP so that they can provide more effective services to municipalities throughout Manitoba.

AMM Resolution #49-2023: Mental Health Amendment Act - SP

Sponsor(s)

Russell-Binscarth, Municipality (Midwestern)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to pursue changes to the Mental Health Amendment Act.
