

Better Access for Islanders to Mental Health and Addictions Services and Supports

November 2013

EXPANDING METHADONE TREATMENT ACCESS

Q: What is methadone and how does it work?

A: Methadone is an effective and legal substitute for opioid drugs such as heroin, codine, morphine, Dilaudid and Percodan. It eliminates or reduces drug cravings, without causing a person to get high. People who are dependent on opioid drugs can take methadone to help stabilize their lives and reduce the harms related to their drug use. It has been used in treatment programs since the early 1960s.

Q: How will the Province of Prince Edward Island expand methadone treatment?

A: The Province of Prince Edward Island will establish a new low-threshold methadone clinic in Charlottetown. This new clinic will help serve an increasingly diverse population struggling with drug addictions and reduce wait times at the provincial addictions facility.

In addition, the province has recently expanded the Provincial Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) Program with the addition of one new registered nurse and one new addiction worker in Summerside.

Q: What is meant by low threshold?

A: All methadone programs are provided with the hopes that it will help improve a person's life. At one end of the spectrum are low threshold programs that focus on harm reduction. The aim of such programs is to engage chronically relapsing and complex clients and to continue to provide them with methadone and access to other services.

Q: How does a low threshold clinic work?

A: In a low threshold program, clients are required to see a physician for dose adjustment and monitoring but missing appointments or cycling in and out of treatment or ongoing substance use is not viewed as grounds for dismissal or transfer from the program. The core of low-threshold programs is that they make it easy for clients who are not a good fit for more traditional programs but who would benefit from methadone maintenance to get the treatment they need. Low-threshold clinics often offer services such as counseling but do not require clients to enroll in the services.

Q: How will the new clinic work?

A: A multidisciplinary team will provide care to clients in an easily accessible location in Charlottetown. The primary difference between the existing methadone program at the provincial addictions facility and a community-based clinic will be that as a low-threshold program, the primary focus is on harm reduction. Clients will still interact on a regular basis with the healthcare team through prescribing, screening, and dispensing. The option to receive counseling and work towards reducing or eliminating other drug use will be available, but not a requirement of remaining in the program.