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Increasing Policing Efficiency with the Saskatoon Action Accord

Chief Clive Weighill, Saskatoon Police Service

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The Saskatoon Action Accord is the result of cooperation between a dozen or more Saskatoon organizations, all dedicated to assisting those with addiction and related issues, to access referral and support resources that will help them to move down the path to recovery. Included are:

- Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners
- Saskatoon Tribal Council
- Saskatoon Health Region
- Saskatchewan Federation of Indian Nations
- Saskatoon Police Service (SPS)

In Saskatoon, thousands of people are arrested each year for intoxication despite not committing a criminal offence. On July 1, 2011, an Action Accord initiative began which focused on the care of persons placed in the SPS detention due to intoxication. As a result, the Saskatoon Health Region began funding paramedics to work in the SPS detention unit to enhance the care and protection of intoxicated people. Detention Primary Care Paramedic (PCP) assessment services began on a 12-hour per day / 7 days per week basis. Also in July, 2013, the Lighthouse Emergency Shelter opened 20 stabilization beds.

The focus of the Action Accord group has been centered around two overriding questions.

Can we, as a community:

1. provide enhanced care for those who end up in detention due to intoxication, and do so in a better environment than police service cells?
2. improve access for those who end up in detention (due to intoxication) to the facilities that are designed specifically to provide the needed referral and support services?

STUDY AIMS

An analysis was conducted, framed by the two overriding questions of the Action Accord group, to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Action Accord initiatives.

METHODS

The analysis was based on information from 2013, which was the first full year of available data. A set of metrics was reviewed for the twelve months of the year. The number of PCP assessments, as well as intoxication referrals, intakes and arrests were used to assess activity levels and service delivery. The trend lines for 2013 were analyzed and, wherever possible, compared to prior years.

RESULTS

Results indicated consistent progress in addressing the Action Accord key questions:

A. The demand for police service attention to the issue of public intoxication is steady.

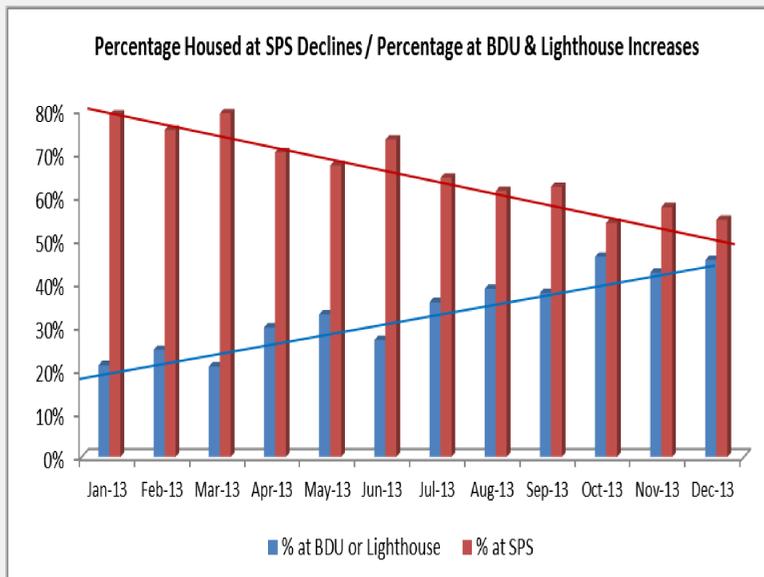
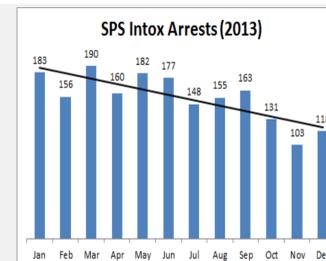
- The annual number of PCP assessments showed that the need for the service remains very high (799 in 2012 & 702 in 2013) with minor monthly fluctuations.
- The total intake to SPS detention, the Brief Detoxification Unit (BDU) & Lighthouse remained constant over 2013 with a minor decline late in the year.

B. People who enter detention for intoxication are increasingly housed in the most appropriate facilities.

- Following the July 2013 launch of the Lighthouse Emergency Shelter, "turned away referrals" at the BDU hit its lowest point in 4 years. Consequently, the number of SPS referrals who could be housed at the BDU, also increased.

C. Positive results are showing up in varying forms.

- The number of actual SPS arrests for intoxication decreased throughout 2013 with the last few months lower than the monthly average (2013 monthly average = 156).
- Fewer intoxicated people are being housed in SPS detention and more in facilities that have access to appropriate referral and support services (BDU & Lighthouse).



DISCUSSION

One of the objectives set out by the Action Accord was a capacity expansion of "appropriate facilities". Due to the BDU often being at maximum capacity early in the day, the traditional use of SPS detention for intoxicated people has been one of necessity, not of choice. The opening of the Lighthouse Emergency Shelter has removed some of the strain on the BDU allowing for more people to be housed in the appropriate facilities. The target to have fewer intoxicated people housed in SPS detention and more in facilities which have the greatest access to referral and support services, is now being met.

In January 2013, approximately 80% of persons in detention due to intoxication were housed in SPS cells with the other 20% at either the BDU or the Lighthouse. By December 2013, just over 50% were in police service cells with the remainder split between the BDU and the Lighthouse. The number of intoxication arrests also dropped from 183 in January to 118 in December.

CONCLUSIONS

The Saskatoon Action Accord and the addition of the Lighthouse Emergency Shelter provided the necessary capacity to better enable the provision of emergency shelter and access to services to people in need. This helps to ensure that vulnerable people are treated with dignity and respect while at the same time increases police efficiencies.

The Action Accord may be a step toward a successful long-term strategy to address health and social services gaps. Future Saskatoon Action Accord initiatives and research into the feasibility of a province-wide expansion of the program are necessary.

REFERENCES

Saskatoon Action Accord (2014). Saskatoon Action Accord Achieves Significant Progress [Media release].

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