



Wood Buffalo Wellness Society  
PO Box 5748  
Fort McMurray, Alberta  
T9H 4V9

Phone (780) 334 – 2398  
Fax (780) 334 – 2352  
[www.woodbuffalowellnesssoceity.com](http://www.woodbuffalowellnesssoceity.com)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## WOOD BUFFALO WELLNESS SOCIETY RESPONDS TO MLA TANY YAO'S CRITICISM OF TAWAW PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IN LEGISLATURE

(November 22, 2024, Fort McMurray, Alberta, Treaty 8) – The Wood Buffalo Wellness Society was recently informed that it was at risk of losing much of its addiction support funding for the Tawâw program from Alberta Health Services.

The Tawâw Housing Initiative is a critical program that aligns with community needs and a recovery-oriented care model, delivering life-changing support to some of the region's most vulnerable residents.

### **Providing recovery-oriented care to “hardest to house” individuals**

Tawâw is an Indigenous-led housing initiative that provides recovery-oriented care to individuals deemed “hardest to house”, including those who are housed directly from encampments or experience chronic homelessness. The program meets a vital need in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB), offering services that no other housing solution can adequately provide.

Currently, Tawâw houses 14 eligible residents, with plans to expand capacity to 32 individuals at any given time. The program is currently receiving provincial funding allocated through the RMWB's Community Plan on Homelessness.

Drug use is not permitted on site, and there are consequences to the residents and their guests if they engage in prohibited behaviours, like drug use.

The partnership between Tawâw and Alberta Health Services/Recovery Alberta is essential to ensure the supportive living component of the program is sustainable. Without it, program participants face a high likelihood of returning to homelessness, the dangers of encampments, and increased reliance on emergency systems – all of which places these individuals at a greater risk of death. Our Indigenous focused program is open to everyone experiencing chronic homelessness, fostering inclusivity, respect, and healing for all.



Wood Buffalo Wellness Society  
PO Box 5748  
Fort McMurray, Alberta  
T9H 4V9

Phone (780) 334 – 2398  
Fax (780) 334 – 2352  
[www.woodbuffalowellnessociety.com](http://www.woodbuffalowellnessociety.com)

## **Wood Buffalo Wellness Society experiencing positive program outcomes**

In operation since December 2023, Tawâw program administrators have witnessed many positive health outcomes for the residents who have taken part in this permanent supportive housing program:

- 20% of residents have entered residential addiction treatment and detox programs.
- 15 residents have been referred to residential treatment programs.
- 80% of residents are participating in onsite AHS addictions supports and/or counselling.
- Two residents have graduated on to independent housing and employment.

## **Wood Buffalo Wellness Society well positioned to deliver Tawâw**

The Tawâw program is run by the Wood Buffalo Wellness Society, which has served the RMWB since 2007.

Between March 2023 to April 2024, the Society achieved the following outcomes:

- 29 individuals were successfully housed in the organization’s Housing with Supports program, directly addressing homelessness and providing stable housing solutions.
- 20 individuals were housed directly from encampment living into the organization’s Bridge Housing program, providing priority access to safe housing for the most vulnerable.
- Three individuals completed treatment programs, showcasing Wood Buffalo Wellness Society’s commitment to recovery.
- Four individuals successfully graduated to independent living, showcasing a dedication to long-term stability.

These outcomes are part of a significant impact on homelessness efforts in the region and position Wood Buffalo Wellness Society to continue successfully delivering the Tawâw program.

## **Support for Tawâw is strong across the RMWB**

“The ongoing mental health and addiction crisis has had deadly consequences from the First Nations communities of the Wood Buffalo region. The Athabasca Tribal Council declared a State of Local Emergency (SOLE) in September 2023 to find solutions to combat this crisis. The



Wood Buffalo Wellness Society

PO Box 5748

Fort McMurray, Alberta

T9H 4V9

Phone (780) 334 – 2398

Fax (780) 334 – 2352

[www.woodbuffalowellnessociety.com](http://www.woodbuffalowellnessociety.com)

recovery-oriented care that Tawâw provides is a desperately needed service in the region during the SOLE. ATC objects to any Government attempts to reduce funding for such a Regional Service that saves lives” - Chief Allan Adam, President of the Athabasca Tribal Council and Chief of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation

"I am deeply troubled by the recent inaccurate statements regarding alleged drug use at the Tawâw Housing Initiative. In reality, Tawâw serves as a vital lifeline for the region's most vulnerable residents, offering critical medically supervised programs that address community needs through a recovery-oriented care model. This initiative provides life-changing support to those it serves. McMurray Métis will be requesting a direct meeting with Hon. Dan Williams, Alberta's Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, to address this misinformation and emphasize the essential partnership between Tawâw, Alberta Health Services, and Recovery Alberta." – President Kelly Myers, McMurray Métis

For more information:

Wood Buffalo Wellness Society

Jo-Anne Packham, Executive Director

780-880-4477

[ed@woodbuffalowellnessociety.com](mailto:ed@woodbuffalowellnessociety.com)