

## Envision is a place you can turn for mental health support

Written by: Brian Zinchuk -- Published: January 27, 2020 07:25 PM



Christa Daku  
Photo By Brian Zinchuk

*Estevan* – The oil downturn has taken a tremendous toll on many, if not most, of the people in the oilpatch. Now over five years long, the tough slog may be wearing some people's mental health down. But where can you turn for help?

One answer, at least in southeast Saskatchewan, is Envision Counselling and Support Centre Inc. It has locations in Estevan, Weyburn, Carlyle and Oxbow. Christa Daku is the executive director, and she spoke to Pipeline News on Dec. 12.

"We've expanded our programming in various areas," Daku said. "One is the employee assistance program (EAP). That is a benefit plan counselling program we offer in Estevan and Weyburn. That's for individuals who have benefits plans that are able to come in and pay, and get reimbursed through their companies.

"We expanded because that was a significant gap in our area. This was one of the reasons. We wanted to open up that opportunity to the male population. We're talking different generations.

"Almost half our clientele is male now," she said. That was not the case several years ago.

"We're seeing a significant amount of increase with individuals struggling in the oilpatch. We have a

walk-in program as well, in Estevan on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10-4 and Weyburn on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10-4. Anyone is welcome to go to our Walk In Counselling Program as there are no parameters.

"We have established a great partnership in both communities with Salvation Army, where the space is provided for our clinics.

"It's easier for those individuals who don't want to develop a relationship with a counsellor. It's solution-focused, an hour long, and you walk away with some tools. And if you need to come back, you do, and if you don't, you don't," Daku said.

There is no oilfield-specific general mental health support line akin to the Farm Stress Line (1-800-667-4442). But she said 211 Saskatchewan (<https://sk.211.ca/>) is a great referral resource covering every area of the province. "They do text and talk, 24 hours a day. It gives resources of every area of the province. They're available as well, for reaching out and support."

The downturn in the energy sector in our southeast communities has been instrumental and has impacted the lives of many people. "That's not just the oilpatch. It's affecting many other businesses, as well, and the economy as a whole. And a lot of those people and business owners are affected as well. Those who did plan to retire have had to look at alternative ways and seek support.

"We just did a presentation to Weyburn city council around the impact and the severity of the situational mental illness, regarding depression and anxiety right now. It's not acute mental health issues, but it's definitely there. A lot of people are living with unpredictability. They don't know what tomorrow's going to bring.

“The reality that everyone’s been living, watching layoffs, and the unpredictable circumstances of what was our thriving economy is really scary for people to adapt to, to cope with and to make lifestyle changes, if necessary,” she said.

“We are still a society where we have stereotypical views around the male provider. That’s still part of everyday life, although we still want to look at equality. It’s just a reality, and I think a lot of men really look at that as their livelihood. It’s their pride. It meets their picture of what they need to be in life. When that’s taken away, what’s left in life?” she said, referring to a job.

“I think it’s really important to focus on changing views of ourselves, and the expectations of ourselves. That’s what it boils down to, for everybody.”

Some people have told *Pipeline News* the length of downturn, over five years now, has combined with a sense there is no end in sight. A year ago, the price of oil seemed to be slowly recovering, but the last year saw it drop to the US\$50s again. With it, some people may have felt that light they thought they saw at the end of the tunnel turned into a train.

Asked about that, she said, “We focus on the present day, and what their challenges are in the present day. We try not to get into the what-ifs, and build skills and tools that can get them through those periods of what-ifs. Change creates fear for most people, and I think it’s really important to reach out for that support if people feel destitute, like they have no answers. It’s a real challenge, for society as a whole, because it’s impacting everywhere.

That “it” is the downturn in the economy and the unpredictability. There could be a light at the end of the tunnel, or there could not be, she said. “We don’t know. So how are we going to cope and live with today?”

Counselling can provide concrete tools and acknowledgement of one’s fears. “People are afraid to be afraid, and afraid to feel those feelings. I think it’s important to acknowledge them and get the tools to rise above.”

As an example she said, “We work on thinking patterns, and on different coping skills. Oftentimes these stressors can impact our relationships, so we focus on our own behaviours and strengths. I think

that’s one thing we provide – really excellent services, as an agency. We can work with the client to find the strengths to build on.”

### **Employee assistance program**

“There are a lot of really great EAP providers,” Daku said, noting most required a counsellor to have a masters in social work or psychology.

Envision has two counsellors who see clients in that regard.

Benefits plans will sometimes cover this. Otherwise, sessions cost \$75 each for those without insurance.

Daku said uptake has increased, and a lot of coming in for the walk-in service are from the oilpatch. Now about 50 per cent of their available counselling time is being used, so we have available spaces for clients to use.

Daku feels there’s been a province-wide emphasis on mental health, and that is seen as just as important as physical health. “We’re at a crucial time where there needs to be change,” she said.

“I think awareness has opened the door. It’s not such a taboo subject. Suicide and suicide ideation is real. A lot of movement has taken place.”