

Editorial

The Drayton Valley

Western Review

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Our Editorial

Invest more in STI prevention

Edmonton Journal Editorial Board

In 2007, the former Capital Health

launched a public information

campaign regarding the dangers of

syphilis as a result of an outbreak of

the disease in Alberta. The campaign

included ads at bus stops on 124

Street at 112 Avenue, Sun Media

In many people's minds, there are

good diseases and bad diseases. By

that, we mean good diseases receive

public sympathy, fundraisers, media

attention and the lion's share of

health-care funding.

Other maladies are rarely spoken of in

public company so dark is their stigma.

Far from being lionized with charity runs

or coloured ribbons, their sufferers are

often ignored, scorned or shamed into

believing they got what they deserve.

It's clear the sexually transmitted

infections syphilis and gonorrhoea fall

into the latter category. It's also evident

that their untreatable nature plays a role

in helping them spread quickly and qui-

etly. Syphilis and gonorrhoea cases are

currently skyrocketing across the prov-

ince but you would never know it from

the level of public awareness about the

outbreak and how to prevent its spread.

Instances of gonorrhoea have more

than doubled since 2014, to more than

5,000 cases in 2018 from 1,900 in 2014.

Syphilis cases, meanwhile, have soared

to over 1,500 in 2018 from 160 in 2014.

In Edmonton, the highest infection

rates are found in the inner city —

among marginalized populations. But

the biggest tragedy is what's happen-

ing to their babies. In the last four

years, 23 infants have been diagnosed

with congenital syphilis — where a

woman passes the infection on to her

unborn child. When that happens, the

disease can cause still births and life-

long effects such as neurological, liver

or cardiovascular damage. Another

two infants were stillborn.

The disease can result in lifelong

irreversible damage.

Yet, the last time anyone in the prov-

ince would have seen a public alert

about syphilis or gonorrhoea would

likely be eight years ago, when Alberta

launched its \$2-million "Penalty of Syph"

education campaign. Even that initia-

tive was a related response because it

took so long for authorities to see the

epidemic was warning by then. Still, the

PC government committed \$14 million

over three years to combat sexually

transmitted infections.

It's likely not a coincidence that not

long after that funding commitment

ended, this latest outbreak started in

2015, and in the vacuum of public infor-

mation, it's raging. At the same time, an

STI outreach at the Boyle Street inner-

city agency that supported at-risk preg-

nant women was disbanded because its

funding wasn't renewed.

Although Alberta Health Services is

working on a plan with community

partners and has been running a

social media awareness campaign

since January, the rising rates of infec-

tion show that not enough is being

done to encourage condom use or

regular testing as the outbreak rages.

The toll on human health should be

enough to provoke action. But also

consider the enormous cost of treat-

ing this life-long impact of an STI out-

break. If the provincial government is

serious about controlling health-care

costs, they must invest more in pre-

vention and education now.

(Local editors rate the consensus

opinion as the Journal's editorial board,

comprising Mark Tys, Dave Breaker,

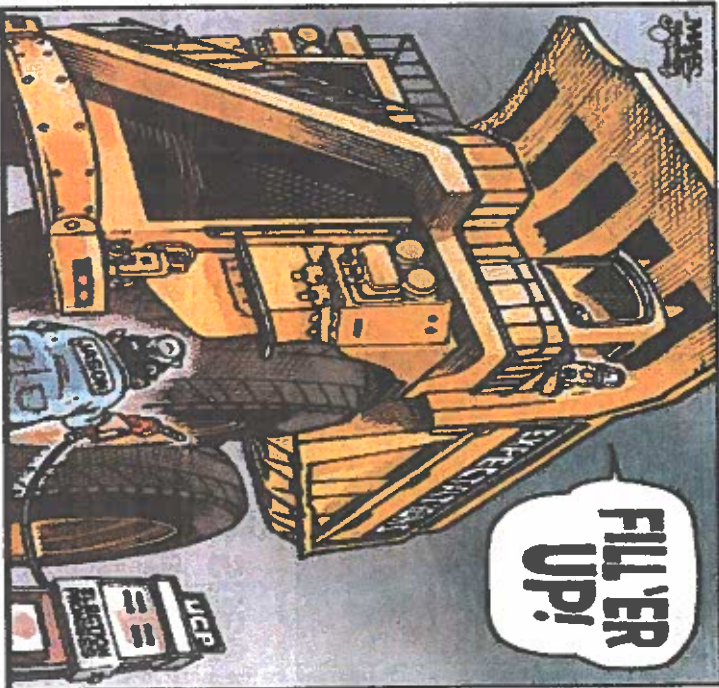
Shawn O'Donnell and Bill Mohr.)

(Editors note: This editorial has

been corrected to reflect the fact that

AHS has been running an awareness

campaign since January.)



Wow, what a week

Wow. What a week it was. Rodeo Week in Drayton Valley, that is.

Not only did we have some four days of fantastic rodeo action, there were scads of rodeo-related activities to see and take part in throughout the week as well. There were two pancake breakfasts over the May 4th and 5th weekends

served by Brzezeu County and Town of Drayton Valley coun-

ties; there was a cowboy poet, Battle to Wriple, reading her poems at the municipal library and on May 4, little cowpokes had an opportunity to try call roping with a real lasso (but not a real cow) that also took place at the library.

One new activity planned for Rodeo Week was a parade; however, due to a low response rate and problems with a licence, this event had to be cancelled; however, a dance

chili sampling went toward two local charities. Some of the chili was so popular with residents that two teams ran out of it within the first half-hour of the cook-off. The only criticism I had was that two of the chili samples were stone cold when I had a chance to sample them, and that was at 12:30.

Mother Nature was also cranky over Rodeo Weekend when it came to outdoor venues, such as the pancake breakfast, chili cook-off and a Show and Shine, but Drayton Valley residents proved once again that they're hardy folks and a little snow never hurt anybody.

Congratulations and a great big thank you to Tom Hirdens and Drayton Valley Hobbies and Tourism Authority, Drayton Valley Municipal Library, and all the volunteers who helped make Rodeo Week a success.



Cathy Weebian

Cathy's Comments

following Saturday night's rodeo, called Horses and Hoops, more than made up for the lack of parade. And despite a small snowstorm on Friday afternoon, a Chili Cook-off was resurrected this year with seven teams vying for the honour of Best Chili with an engraved wooden spoon as the trophy. Residents definitely benefited from this event as \$2,000 to buy a bowl for