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## TOWNSVILLE DRUG SERVICES NEED HELP NOW

Queensland doctors are calling on the State Government to take urgent action to support Townsville's over-stretched drug rehabilitation services.

The North Queensland city is facing an ice and opiate epidemic and local Queensland Health services are struggling to cope, according to AMA Queensland's North Area Representative and Townsville GP, Dr Michael Clements.

Dr Clements said desperate addicts were being turned away by the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATODs) teams run by Townsville Hospital and Health Service.

"This week I saw a patient who had gone to ATODs for help," Dr Clements said.

"He was told he could not be fully assessed until January, was given some clean needles and told to keep using until ATODs could see him again in the New Year.

"The drug situation here in Townsville is very bad and action is needed to get on top of this problem. ATODs is clearly under-resourced."

A new rehabilitation centre operated by the Salvation Army opened in Townsville in September and was fully booked within weeks.

**Queensland Health's Director-General, Michael Walsh, is due to meet AMA Queensland President, Dr Bill Boyd and local doctors at Townsville Rydges on Thursday morning [Dec 7].**

Dr Clements said the introduction of a statewide real-time prescription monitoring system should also be a priority for Queensland Health.

The system would give doctors and pharmacists desk-top access to the prescription history of patients and would prevent would-be addicts from 'doctor-shopping' – visiting multiple GPs to obtain powerful and addictive painkillers.

"As well as ice, Townsville has a growing problem with the abuse of prescription drugs such as fentanyl and morphine," Dr Clements said.

"Addicts are doctor-shopping, obtaining multiple prescriptions for prescription drugs and placing themselves in great danger.

"Tasmania developed its own prescription monitoring system and has virtually stamped out doctor-shopping, but we are lagging behind in Queensland.

"If we want to save people from drug addiction, Queensland seriously needs to raise its game."

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