

From: [Laponsee, Tanya \(HC/SC\)](#) on behalf of [Novak, Jennifer \(HC/SC\)](#)
To: [Brent Larmer](#)
Cc: [Clerk Cobourg](#)
Subject: (EXTERNAL SOURCE) Opioid Overdose Crisis in Canada
Date: July 14, 2021 11:45:10 AM

Dear Brent Larmer,

Thank you for your correspondence dated December 17, 2020, addressed to the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health, concerning the opioid overdose crisis in Canada. We appreciate you forwarding the resolution adopted by the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg at its Regular Council meeting held on December 14, 2020. I have been asked to respond to you directly. While I cannot determine why there has been such a long delay in receiving your letter, it is unacceptable. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in responding.

I am grateful for the time that you took to share your concerns with us. Hearing from concerned communities like yours is important to us. The Government of Canada has made it a priority to listen to Canadians most impacted by problematic substance use and the opioid overdose crisis to inform a comprehensive, collaborative, and compassionate response. We recognize the complexity and the devastating impacts that the crisis is having on individuals, our friends, families, and communities across the country.

The Government of Canada's approach to substance use issues has been guided by our federal drug strategy – the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy (CDSS). The CDSS takes a public health-focused approach, and lays out our framework for evidence-based actions to reduce the harms associated with substance use in Canada. It includes four key pillars – prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement.

Since the introduction of the CDSS in 2016, the Government of Canada has taken evidence-based [action to address the opioid overdose crisis](#) through investments of over \$700 million as well as legislative and regulatory action. As part of this investment, Budget 2021 proposes to provide \$116 million over two years, starting in 2021-22, building on \$66 million invested in the 2020 Fall Economic Statement, for the Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) to support a range of innovative approaches to harm reduction, treatment, and prevention at the community level.

Concerning the declaration of a national public health emergency, the federal government has publicly recognized and committed to responding to the opioid overdose crisis and is already using the broad range of powers at its disposal. Declaring a public health emergency and invoking the federal Emergencies Act, to manage critical situations of a temporary nature, would not provide any additional measures that would support our immediate or longer-term response efforts. The comprehensive federal response has included reducing legislative and regulatory barriers, awareness campaigns, improving the knowledge base and providing emergency funding to provinces and territories, which were put in place without a

formal declaration of a public health emergency.

The opioid overdose crisis is a complex public health issue and we recognize that no single organization or level of government can solve this situation alone. The Government remains committed to working with a wide range of partners – including the provinces and territories, people who use drugs and with lived and living experience, Indigenous peoples and racialized communities, civil society organizations, public health and law enforcement leaders – to determine the best ways to support people who use substances, advance solutions to save lives and help reverse this national public health crisis while recognizing that problematic substance use must be treated as a health condition. Thank you again for taking the time to share your views.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Novak
Executive Director
Opioid Response Team
Controlled Substances and Cannabis Branch
Health Canada
[Canada.ca/opioids](https://canada.ca/opioids) // [Canada.ca/opioides](https://canada.ca/opioides)