

November 17, 2020

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

Re: The Overdose Crisis

I am writing, on behalf of Moms Stop The Harm (MSTH), to request your assistance in ending the overdose crisis and the toll it is taking on our communities.

MSTH is a network of Canadian families impacted by substance use related harms and deaths. Our network provides peer support to grieving families and those with loved ones who use or have used substances. In addition, our organization works hard to change failed drug policies.

MSTH knows that municipalities have also been working hard, both on the ground and with representative bodies such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). We would like to sincerely thank you for your efforts and thank FCM members for the call for a pan-Canadian response to the opioid crisis.

We recognize that your efforts have brought significant progress in some areas, but there is still a long way to go. At present, there is no comprehensive plan to deal with the opioid crisis, even though it is one of the largest public health emergencies of our lifetime, with a death on average about every two hours and a death toll of over 16,360 since 2016 (January 2016 to March 2020). Tragically, the number of people dying from overdoses has increased in 2020 in many parts of the country.

As you may know, federal Health Minister Patty Hajdu has resisted calls to declare the overdose crisis a public health emergency. She has also stated that it is premature to talk about drug policy reforms until there are comprehensive supports for people to get well. Recently, the Minister altered this position somewhat by indicating that officials are “deliberating” over decriminalization.[i] MSTH agrees that supports are needed but believes the government’s focus should be on harm reduction and saving lives so that people are able to live long enough to access supports. Currently, the stigma of criminalization causes

people to hide their substance use, and many use and die alone.

It is our view that the federal government needs to do much more than it has to date, which is why we are requesting that your municipality, together with others in Canada, consider passing the [attached resolution](#) calling on the federal government to: 1) do the right thing and declare the overdose crisis a national public health emergency, and 2) work with provinces to develop a comprehensive pan-Canadian plan for ending the overdose crisis.

Thank you very much for considering this request. If you have any concerns about our resolution, please consider passing your own version of a resolution. You can reach us by email at info@momsstoptheharm.com or mail at 5-6038 Willow Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, V5Z 3S6. Additional information about MSTH can be found on our website at <https://www.momsstoptheharm.com/>

Sincerely,

Leslie McBain
Co-founder
Chair, Board of Directors
Moms Stop The Harm

Petra Schultz
Co-founder
Vice Chair, Board of Directors
Moms Stop The Harm

[i] Hina Alam, “Federal health minister says it’s too early for broad drug decriminalization”, Canadian Press, January 16, 2020, <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/federal-health-minister-says-it-s-too-early-for-broad-drug-decriminalization-1.4771090>; CBC, The Current, January 9, 2020, 59:18 minute mark, <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-63-the-current/clip/15754621-remembering-lost-iranian-plane-crash-the-politics-investigating> ; Teresa Wright, “Discussion on decriminalizing drugs should be considered in wake of opioid deaths: Tam”, The Canadian Press, August 22, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7292817/opioid-crisis-decriminalization-tam/>
