October 29, 2020

The Honourable Patty Hajdu
Federal Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6
Via e-mail patty.hajdu@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Christine Elliott
Provincial Minister of Health
5th Floor
777 Bay Street
Toronto ON M7A 2J3
Via e-mail christine.elliott@pc.ola.org

Dear Ministers Hajdu and Elliott:

Re: Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario, Safe Supply

On September 25, 2020 at a regular meeting of the Board of Health for the Grey Bruce Health Unit, the Board considered the attached letters from the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario regarding safer supply initiatives. The following motion was passed:

GBHU BOH Motion 2020-65

Moved by: Anne Eadie Seconded by: Brian O’Leary

“THAT, the Board of Health endorse the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario call on the provincial government to fund implementation of safer supply initiatives in a coordinated approach with the federal government; and support the implementation of safer supply initiatives by adding the required formulations to the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary to enable injectable safer supply initiatives to operate.”

Carried

Sincerely,

Mitch Twolan
Chair, Board of Health
Grey Bruce Health Unit

Encl.

Cc: Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario, Adrienne Crowder, Alex Ruff, MP Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Terry Dowdall, MP Simcoe-Grey, Ben Lobb, MP Huron-Bruce Association of Local Public Health Agencies, Ontario Health Units

Working together for a healthier future for all.
101 17th Street East, Owen Sound, Ontario N4K 0A5 www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca

519-376-9420 1-800-263-3456 Fax 519-376-0605
Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario
c/o Adrienne Crowder
Manager, Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy
176 Wyndham St. N.
Guelph ON, N1H 898

August 21, 2020

Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health
Government of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa ON, K1A 0A6

Dear Honourable Minister of Health Hajdu,

We would like to commend your government for addressing the drug poisoning crisis by funding and facilitating access to safer supply initiatives, and other health interventions. As you know, safer supply initiatives provide pharmaceutical-grade drugs, such as hydromorphone or diacetylmorphine, to people who use substances within a health care context. However, additional safer supply initiatives are needed in Ontario and across Canada. Therefore, on behalf of the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario (MDSCNO), we urge the Government of Canada to immediately increase funding to safer supply initiatives to save lives, and improve the health, safety and well-being of people who use drugs in our province.

Safer supply initiatives significantly improve individual health by transitioning people from the toxic, unregulated market to pharmaceutical-grade substances within a health care context. Substance use is addressed as a health issue rather than a criminal justice issue. Safer supply initiatives can also offer participants case management and other supports to address a spectrum of health and social concerns. These health initiatives have demonstrated exceptionally high client retention rates and significant reductions in overdose fatalities while simultaneously creating a pathway to health care services for their clients.¹ Beyond the health sector, safer supply initiatives provide significant benefits, including improved community safety and well-being, and reduced

enforcement- and criminal justice-related costs.\textsuperscript{2} For these reasons, they have strong support in many Ontario communities.

In 2019, Ontario recorded the highest number of opioid-related overdose deaths in Canada, with 1,535 people dying from opioid-related poisoning, surpassing the province of British Columbia for the first time.\textsuperscript{3,4} Since the year 2000, when 111 opioid-related fatalities were recorded, the number of preventable deaths has increased every year, resulting in declining life expectancy in Ontario.\textsuperscript{5} While several factors contribute to the drug poisoning crisis, exposure to toxic drugs from an unregulated market is the primary driver of deaths in Ontario and the rest of Canada.

The drug poisoning crisis has been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in two concurrent public health crises. Services have temporarily closed or reduced their hours and capacity. In addition, the unregulated drug market has become increasingly toxic. Stress, isolation, and other pandemic-related factors have increased the risks associated with substance use. Preliminary data from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario shows a 35\% increase in suspected drug-related deaths in Ontario in March, April and May 2020 compared to the monthly average in 2019, with approximately 60 suspected-drug related deaths occurring each week.\textsuperscript{6} It is now more evident than ever that urgent action is needed to address the opioid poisoning crisis that is co-occurring with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In late 2019 and early 2020, most community proposals submitted to the Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) for safer supply initiatives were denied simply because of inadequate funding. The MDSCNO calls on the federal government to urgently increase SUAP funding available for existing proposals, and to issue a second call for new SUAP safer supply proposals to support a full spectrum of safer supply initiatives across Canada.

The MDSCNO’s members are among Ontario’s leading experts in drug policy and program development. We represent comprehensive drug strategies in many municipalities throughout Ontario who share a collective interest in making our province safer and healthier for present and future generations.

\textsuperscript{2} Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Leece P, Tenenbaum M. \textit{Evidence Brief: Effectiveness of supervised injectable opioid agonist treatment (siOAT) for opioid use disorder}. Toronto, ON; 2017.
\textsuperscript{4} Preliminary data from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario shows that there were 1,535 probable and confirmed opioid overdose deaths in Ontario in 2019. This number may increase as coroner’s complete investigations.
\textsuperscript{6} Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario. Personal Communication, August 2020
Sincerely,

Adrienne Crowder  
Manager, Guelph Wellington Drug Strategy  
On behalf of the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario

Susan Shepherd  
Manager, Toronto Drug Strategy Secretariat  
On behalf of the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario

CC:
Prime Minister Trudeau  
Alliance for Healthier Communities  
Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness  
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition  
Canadian Mental Health Association  
Canadian Nurses Association  
Canadian Public Health Association  
Chiefs of Ontario  
College of Nurses of Ontario  
College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario  
Council of Medical Officers of Health  
Federation of Canadian Municipalities  
Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police  
Ontario College of Pharmacists  
Ontario Pharmacists Association  
Ontario Public Health Association  
Public Health Ontario

About the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario
Our 65+ members work in diverse health settings across the province, including public health units, community health centres and not-for-profit organizations. Members coordinate multi-sectoral initiatives that aim to prevent and/or reduce the harms of substance use through regionally tailored strategies incorporating prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement-justice initiatives. Learn more at:
www.drugstrategy.ca.
August 21, 2020

Honourable Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health  
Government of Ontario  
777 Bay Street, 5th Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Elliott,

On behalf of the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario (MDSCNO), we urge the Province of Ontario to immediately fund and scale up implementation of safer supply initiatives to save lives, and improve the health, safety and well-being of people who use drugs in our province.

Safer supply initiatives significantly improve individual health by transitioning people from the toxic, unregulated market to pharmaceutical-grade substances within a health care context. Substance use is addressed as a health issue rather than a criminal justice issue. Safer supply initiatives can also offer participants case management and other supports to address a spectrum of health and social concerns. These health initiatives have demonstrated exceptionally high client retention rates, and significant reductions in overdose fatalities while simultaneously creating a pathway to health care services for their clients.¹

In 2019, Ontario recorded the highest number of opioid-related overdose deaths in Canada, with 1,535 people dying from opioid-related poisoning, surpassing the province of British Columbia for the first time.²³ Since the year 2000, when 111 opioid-related fatalities were recorded, the number of preventable deaths has increased every year,

³ Preliminary data from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario shows that there were 1,535 probable and confirmed opioid overdose deaths in Ontario in 2019. This number may increase as coroner’s complete investigations.
resulting in declining life expectancy in Ontario. While several factors are contributing to the opioid poisoning crisis, exposure to increasingly toxic drugs from an unregulated market is the primary driver of deaths in Ontario and the rest of Canada.

The drug poisoning crisis has been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in two concurrent public health crises. Services have temporarily closed or reduced their hours and capacity. In addition, the unregulated drug market has become increasingly toxic. Stress, isolation, and other pandemic-related factors have increased the risks associated with substance use. Preliminary data from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario shows a 35% increase in suspected drug-related deaths in Ontario in March, April and May 2020 compared to the monthly average in 2019, with approximately 60 suspected-drug related deaths occurring each week. It is now more evident than ever that urgent action is needed to address the opioid poisoning crisis that is co-occurring with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The patient- and system-level benefits of safer supply initiatives directly support the government’s commitment to end hallway health care, reduce wait times, and improve patient interactions within the health care system. Beyond the health sector, safer supply initiatives provide significant benefits, including improved community safety and well-being, and reduced enforcement- and criminal justice-related costs. For these reasons, they have strong support in many Ontario communities.

Therefore, the MDSCNO calls on the provincial government to:

- fund implementation of safer supply initiatives in a coordinated approach with the federal government; and
- support the implementation of safer supply initiatives by adding the required formulations, such as hydromorphone (i.e., 50 milligrams/millilitres and 100 milligrams/millilitres hydromorphone) and diacetylmorphine, to the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary to enable injectable safer supply initiatives to operate.

The MDSCNO’s members are among Ontario’s leading experts in drug policy and program development. We represent comprehensive drug strategies in many municipalities throughout Ontario who share a collective interest in making our province safer and healthier for present and future generations.

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5 Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario. Personal Communication, August 2020

6 Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Leece P, Tenenbaum M. *Evidence Brief: Effectiveness of supervised injectable opioid agonist treatment (sIOAT) for opioid use disorder*. Toronto, ON; 2017.
Sincerely,

Adrienne Crowder  
Manager, Guelph Wellington Drug Strategy  
On behalf of the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario

Susan Shepherd  
Manager, Toronto Drug Strategy Secretariat  
On behalf of the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario

CC:
Premier Doug Ford  
Michael A. Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
Alliance for Healthier Communities  
Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness  
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition  
Canadian Mental Health Association  
Canadian Nurses Association  
Canadian Public Health Association  
Chiefs of Ontario  
College of Nurses of Ontario  
College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario  
Council of Medical Officers of Health  
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Ontario College of Pharmacists  
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