November 27, 2019

VIA: Mail and Email

**ATTN:** Hon. Patty Hajdu  
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**ATTN:** Hon. Christine Elliott  
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**RE:** Endorsement of Regional Municipality of Durham’s Motion re: Opioid Overdose Emergency Resolution

Honourable Ministers of Health,

At a meeting on November 18, 2019, the City of Hamilton Board of Health endorsed the October 24, 2019 correspondence from the Regional Municipality of Durham, regarding their motion on an Opioid Overdose Emergency Resolution.

Within the City of Hamilton, the impact of opioid related health issues continues to rise. This city continues to be disproportionately affected by the opioid crisis with rates for opioid related emergency hospital visits, hospitalizations and deaths that are higher than the Ontario provincial average. In 2017, Hamilton opioid related poisonings were 20.4 deaths per 100,000 vs. Vancouver rates of 20.2 deaths per 100,000. Opioid related death rates for 2018 continued to rise, and early reports for 2019 indicate this trend is continuing. Demands on emergency medical services including paramedicine services, emergency department visits and hospitalizations continue to escalate and represent a significant cost to the health care system. The cost of the opioid crisis on human life and the subsequent implications for persons who are using substances and their family and friends is beyond measure.

The harms related to opioid use not only include opioid poisonings, but also include opioid use disorders, adverse drug reactions, neonatal withdrawal, secondary infections
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such as HIV, Hepatitis, invasive group A streptococcal infections, endocarditis, pervasive individual trauma and community violence. These harms contribute to the need for the declaration of an Opioid Emergency across the province and the country.

The factors that lead to opioid use and substance use disorder are multiple and pervasive. Trauma, violence, and economic disparity are a few of the components of this issue. Many factors are related to social determinants of health and thus require long term, persistent and co-ordinated approaches in order to have an impact on the harms caused by opioid misuse.

At its November 18, 2019 meeting, the Hamilton Board of Health recommended that the City Council acknowledge and declare an Opioid Emergency in the City of Hamilton. This declaration recognizes and underscores the seriousness of this issue and allows for renewed attention and continued collective action. The City of Hamilton, like other regions and urban centres needs the support of the federal government and Minister of Health to combat this crisis. This support would best come in the way of public affirmation of the seriousness of this issue, a co-ordinated federal and provincial drug strategy and funding to support and expand evidence-based responses that support all pillars of drug strategy: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and social justice.

This multifaceted approach is addressed in the correspondence from the Regional Municipality of Durham, which outlines specific recommendations from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Mayor’s Task Force and Association of Municipalities Ontario to combat this epidemic. In addition, at its meeting on November 27, 2019 Hamilton City Council endorsed urging the Minister of Health to seek authority from Health Canada to import diacetylmorphine (pharmaceutical heroin) for use as a managed opioid program medication.

The recommendations in the endorsed letter provide a roadmap for success through the declaration of a national epidemic, co-ordination of response across the country and funding to support public health units and Boards of Health to continue to provide evidence-based interventions to address the opioid crisis such as managed opioid programs and services.

Sincerely,

Fred Eisenberger
Endorsement of Regional Municipality of Durham’s Motion re: Opioid Overdose Emergency Resolution

Mayor

CC:
Hon. Bob Bratina, MP, Hamilton East – Stoney Creek
Hon. Scott Duvall, MP, Hamilton Mountain
Hon. Matthew Green, MP, Hamilton Centre
Hon. Filomena Tassi, MP, Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas
Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health
Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA)
Ontario Boards of Health