July 15, 2022

Hon. Sylvia Jones
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
3rd Floor, 180 Broadway Ave.
Orangeville, ON L9W 1K3

Dear Minister Jones:

Re: Letter of Support – Addressing Substance Use Harms

On June 8, 2022, at a regular meeting of the Board for the Timiskaming Health Unit, the Board considered a staff report related to addressing substance use related harms including a letter from Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit endorsing a set of recommendations for the province of Ontario and provincial Ministry of Health to help address the escalating opioid crisis province-wide.

Motion (#25R-2022) was passed which included endorsement of the Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington (KFLA) Drug Strategy Advisory Committee’s online petition to reduce the harms to those who use illicit drugs. In addition the motion included a call on the federal government to decriminalize the possession of all illicit drugs for personal use as an evidence-informed approach that acknowledges that substance use is a health issue and not one of morality, will power or criminal justice and, further that the federal government support the immediate scale up of prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services.

The motion also included the following:

That the Timiskaming Board of Health endorse the letter from Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) to the Ontario Minister of Health (Appendix A) in response to the Opioid Crisis province-wide (recommendations 1 – 7), and that this be communicated in writing to the Ontario Minister of Health.

The Timiskaming Health Unit fully supports the above recommendation, and thanks you for your consideration for expanding these provisions to all public health unit regions.

Sincerely,

Carman Kidd, Board of Health Chair
Enclosure

C: Michael A. Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addiction  
Hon. John Vanthof, MPP, Timiskaming-Cochrane  
Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
Kerry Schubert-Mackey and Tyler Twarowski Co-Chairs, Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy
March 16, 2022

The Honourable Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Elliott:

Re: Response to the Opioid Crisis in Simcoe Muskoka and Ontario-wide

On March 16, 2022, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) Board of Health endorsed a set of provincial recommendations to help address the ongoing and escalating opioid crisis experienced within Simcoe Muskoka and province-wide. Despite regional activities in response to the opioid crisis, there remains an urgent need for heightened provincial attention and action to promptly and adequately address the extensive burden of opioid-related deaths being experienced by those who use substances.

In the 19 months of available data since the start of the pandemic (March 2020 to September 2021) there have been 245 opioid-related deaths in Simcoe Muskoka. This is nearly 70% higher than the 145 opioid-related deaths in the 19 months prior to the start of the pandemic (August 2018 to February 2020), when our communities were already struggling in the face of this crisis. The first nine months of 2021 saw an opioid-related death rate more than 33% higher than the first nine months of 2020, suggesting the situation has not yet stabilized.

As such, the SMDHU Board of Health urges your government to take the following actions:

1. Create a multisectoral task force to guide the development of a robust provincial opioid response plan that will ensure necessary resourcing, policy change, and health and social system coordination.
2. Expand access to evidence informed harm reduction programs and practices including lifting the provincial cap of 21 Consumption and Treatment Service (CTS) Sites, funding Urgent Public Health Needs Sites (UPHNS) and scaling up safer opioid supply options.
3. Explore revisions to the current CTS model to address the growing trends of opioid poisoning amongst those who are using inhalation methods.
4. Expand access to opioid agonist therapy for opioid use disorder through a range of settings (e.g. mobile outreach, primary care, emergency departments), and a variety of medication options.
5. Provide a long-term financial commitment to create more affordable and supportive housing for people in need, including people with substance use disorders.
6. Address the structural stigma and harms that discriminate against people who use drugs, through provincial support and advocacy to the Federal government to decriminalize personal use and possession of substances and ensure increased investments in health and social services at all levels.
7. Increase investments in evidence-informed substance use prevention and mental health promotion initiatives, that provide foundational support for the health, safety and well-being of individuals, families, and neighbourhoods, beginning from early childhood.


The SMDHU Board of Health has endorsed these recommendations based on the well-demonstrated need for a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach that addresses the social determinants of health and recognizes the value of harm reduction strategies alongside substance use disorder treatment strategies, as part of the larger opioid crisis response. Evidence has shown that harm reduction strategies can prevent overdoses, save lives, and connect people with treatment and social services. Further, there is an urgent need to change the current Canadian drug policy to allow a public health response to substance use, through decriminalization of personal use and possession paired with avenues towards health and social services, as our Board called for in 2018. These recommendations collectively promote effective public health and safety measures to address the social and health harms associated with substance use.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Anita Dubreau
Board of Health Chair
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

cc: Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
    Attorney General of Ontario
    Chief Medical Officer of Health
    Association of Local Public Health Agencies
    Ontario Health
    Ontario Boards of Health
    Members of Parliament in Simcoe Muskoka
    Members of Provincial Parliament in Simcoe Muskoka
    Mayors and Municipal Councils in Simcoe Muskoka