May 25, 2022

Right Honorable Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau,

Honorable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health,

Honorable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions

**Re: The Poisoned Drug Crisis**

Dear Ministers,

I am deeply disturbed by the fact that ***every day 20 Canadians die*** from consuming poisoned drugs, and that official figures show that almost 27,000 Canadians have died since 2016. If we had just 1 death from a poisoned food or alcohol source there would be an uproar. Yet when 27,000 people are killed by deliberately tainted psychoactive drugs, victims are blamed and the issue swept under the carpet. Today’s 20 people are symptoms of three basic societal failures:

* the crushing **poverty** trap that drives people to seek solace from alcohol and other substances, most of which are currently deemed illegal;
* the lack of **access to mental health supports** to ease stress felt at all income levels; and
* the lack of regulation over the **quality of products** people need to live, though food, alcohol, and legal drugs are tightly regulated.

The root problems of poverty and access to mental health supports certainly require concerted action at all levels of government. However, the poisoned drug supply problem, which is primarily under federal jurisdiction, requires bold actions that only you can take, including:

1. Passing Bill C-216, to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize the possession of substances for personal use.
2. Enacting the Expungement of Certain Drug-related Convictions Act to end the stigma imposed by having a criminal record.
3. Enacting the National Strategy on Substance Use Act to advance a coordinated national strategy to address substance-related harms, and creating a National Safe Supply Strategy to:
	* + enable development and wide distribution of pharmaceutical-grade substances;
		+ regulate the trade in now-illicit substances; and
		+ provide people who use drugs with the low-barrier access, knowledge and information needed to make and act on informed decisions about substances.
4. Creating a national, evidence-based strategy on responding to the drug poisoning crisis, so that access to life-saving services does not depend on the postal code you live in or the ideology of your provincial government. Such a strategy should aim to expand the range of safe supply approaches and number of locations, and should include:
* developing model guidance for public health units and prescribers;
* expediting the granting of Section 56(1) exemptions to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for community-based safe supply initiatives;
* reducing barriers to funding mechanisms such as the Substance Use and Addictions Program to enable urgent expansion of community-based safe supplies;
* ensuring equitable access to emerging safe supply initiatives especially to intersecting
marginalized populations and those who are traditionally underserved by health initiatives; and
* consulting with community-based safe supply organizations and people who use substances who can inform the immediate development of community-based solutions for safe supply.

All parties and levels of government need to work together on this drug poisoning emergency, so I copy other elected representatives and ministers.

Sincerely,

--------------

Address or postal code

cc: My Member of Parliament: ---------------

Federal Political Party Critics: Michael Barrett, Mike Lane, Don Davies, Gord Johns, Luc Thériault, Elizabeth May

House of Commons Health Committee Chair: Sean Casey

Ontario Minister of Health: Christine Elliot

Toronto Mayor: John Tory

Toronto Board of Health Vice Chair: Stephanie Donaldson