

November 2, 2015

Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1
premier@ontario.ca

Hon. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
10th floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor St.
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4
ehoskins.mpp@liberal.ola.org

Re: Request for Ontario Overdose Coordinator and Action Plan

Dear Premier Wynne and Minister Hoskins,

The Government of Ontario has taken some important steps on the issue of opioid overdose, including the provision of naloxone to select HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C programs. However, further action on overdose prevention and intervention is urgently needed to build on these initial steps. In 2013, an Ontarian died every 14 hours from an opioid-related cause, an increase of 463% since 2000¹. Opioids are now a leading cause of accidental death, comparable to fatalities on Ontario's roadways².

Beyond the human cost, overdose is costing scarce health dollars. A recent Ontario Drug Policy Research Network report³ noted that hospital emergency department visits due to opioid toxicity increased across Ontario between 2006 and 2013, particular among older Ontarians. Hospitalizations increased 22.5% across all age groups.

Reducing opioid overdose fatalities has not been a priority to date when compared to resources devoted to preventing other causes of accidental death. For example, 92 anaphylactic deaths were recorded during a 25-year period between 1986 and 2011⁴ while fatalities due to opioid-related overdoses totalled almost 5000 people in just 13 years (2000-2013). Legislation, plans, policies and practices are in place to reduce anaphylaxis deaths, but not for opioid-related fatalities. In 2012, opioid-related deaths (595)⁵ exceeded traffic fatalities on Ontario's roads (568)⁶ and while extensive plans, policies and practices exist to reduce motor vehicle collisions, a similar effort is absent to reduce opioid-related deaths. Yet evidence-based strategies and interventions exist and are supported in policy and practice throughout the United States and the United Kingdom.

'Ontario Overdose Coordinator' Role: We request that the Government of Ontario provide a coordinating body, led by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, with associated resources to support integrated responses among public and private stakeholders with a role in preventing opioid-related deaths. A concerted effort among multiple partners such as the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, physicians, pharmacists, nurses, emergency services, and hospitals, among others, is required. Ontario lacks leadership and coordination on this pressing (complex) issue. Senior leadership must be created to facilitate, coordinate and support new and ongoing efforts that will save lives. This 'Ontario Overdose Coordinator' must be able to work across multiple sectors and organizations, and across ministries, to expedite overdose prevention and intervention measures.

Overdose Action Plan: Despite at least 13 years of rising and record-setting fatalities, Ontario does not have an overdose prevention and response plan with targets, timelines and funding. Many U.S. states have a dedicated plan for overdose fatality prevention, coordination support, and attached implementation resources. In Canada, British Columbia's Centre for Disease Control may be the only provincial entity providing planning and implementation support to prevent opioid overdose fatalities.

On June 1, 2015 the Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinator's Network of Ontario provided the Government of Ontario and other stakeholders with evidence-based recommendations to reduce opioid-related deaths in Ontario in the *Prescription for Life* report⁷. These urgent recommendations call for expanded access to the lifesaving emergency medicine naloxone. We concur with the Association of Local Public Health Agencies of Ontario who endorsed the *Prescription for Life* report and called for expedited expansion of naloxone access and the concurrent creation of a provincial naloxone strategy⁸.

In Ontario, there is significant non-governmental interest and expertise to advance the *Prescription for Life* recommendations. We encourage the Government of Ontario to provide support to reduce the preventable deaths attributable to both the medical and non-medical use of opioids.

Each passing week brings 12 additional opioid-related deaths, and substantially more non-fatal, life-threatening overdoses in Ontario - and many more grieving families and friends. The rapid rise in bootleg fentanyl deaths in Canada and the United States adds urgency to the current crisis. It is time for action on this file.

We thank you in advance for your attention on this urgent matter. We look forward to hearing from your office in order to meet and discuss these issues fully. To arrange this meeting, please contact Dr. Rosana (Pellizzari) Salvaterra at rsalvaterra@pcchu.ca / 1-877-743-0101, ext. 264.

Sincerely,

Alan Beattie, Executive Director, Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto

Dr. Philip Berger, MD, Medical Director, Inner City Health Program, St. Michael's Hospital; Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto

Dr. Gary Bloch, Physician, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto

Board of Health for the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit

Dr. Jenn Braun, Physician, Guelph Community Health Centre

Nicola Bryant, Nurse Practitioner, Guelph Community Health Centre

Natasha Campbell and Lindsay Klassen, Co-Chairs, Preventing Overdose Waterloo Wellington (POWW)

Ruth Cameron, Executive Director, AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo & Area

Dr. Chris Cavacuiti, Medical Director, TrueNorth Medical Centre

Walter Cavalieri, Director, Canadian Harm Reduction Network

Lynda Chilibeck, BScPhm, RPh, Director of Clinical Programs, Peterborough Networked Family Health Teams

Pat Cliche, Chairperson, North Bay and Area Community Drug Strategy Committee

Angus Coll-Smith, Coordinator, Halton Equitable Drug Strategy

Chris Cowie, Chair, Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council

Councillor Joe Cressy, Chair, Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel

Adrienne Crowder, Manager, Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy

Bill Davidson, Executive Director, Langs Community Health Centre, Cambridge

Dr. Janet DeMille, MD MPH CCFP FRCPC, Acting Medical Officer of Health, Thunder Bay District Health Unit

Sandy Dietrich-Bell, CEO, OneROOF Youth Services, Waterloo Region

Richard Elliott, Executive Director, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

David B. Gibson, Executive Director, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, Ottawa

Ada Giudice-Tompson, Vice-President, Advocates for the Reform of Prescription Opioids (ARPO)

Eric Goldberg, Executive Director, Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre

Kathy Hardill, RNEC, Clinical Director/Lead NP, VON 360 Degree Nurse Practitioner Led Clinic, Peterborough

Dr. Lori Hasulo, Physician, Guelph Community Health Centre

Sophorn Him, Nurse Practitioner, Guelph Community Health Centre

Sherri Fournier Hudson, Executive Director, Upper Canada Family Health Team, Brockville/Thousand Islands

Dr. Meldon Kahan, MD CCFP FRCPC, Medical Director, Substance Use, Women's College Hospital, Toronto

Nathan Kampen, Nurse Practitioner, Guelph Community Health Centre

Reeve Keith Kerr, Tay Valley Township

Dr. Lori Kiefer, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Dr. Gary M. Kirk, MD, MPH, Medical Officer of Health and CEO, Windsor-Essex County Health Unit

Knowledge and Power of Women (KAPOW), Parkdale, Toronto

Dr. Alan Konyer, Physician, Ontario Addiction Treatment Centres

Meagan La Plante, Coordinator, Peterborough Drug Strategy

Dr. Pamela Leece, MD MSc CCFP, Toronto

Patty Letourneau, Coordinator, Kenora Substance Abuse and Mental Health Task Force

Dr. Joyce Lock, MD MSc BSc FRCP(C) CCFP(EM), Medical Officer of Health, Elgin St. Thomas Public Health

Dennis Long, Executive Director, Breakaway Addiction Services, Toronto

Dr. Meredith MacKenzie, MD, BSc, CCFP, FCFP, Street Health Centre, Kingston Community Health Centres

Donald MacPherson, Director, Canadian Drug Policy Coalition

Dr. David Marsh, Chief Medical Director, Canadian Addiction Treatment Centres

Donna May, Founder/Facilitator, Jac's Voice, MumsDU (Moms United and Mandated to Saving the Lives of Drug Users)

John MacTavish, Executive Director, HIV/AIDS Regional Services, Kingston

Dr. David McKeown, Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health

Alan McQuarrie, Executive Director, Community Counselling Centre of Nipissing

Dr. Hamidah Meghani, Medical Officer of Health and Commissioner, Halton Region Health Department

Dr. Liana Nolan, Medical Officer of Health and Commissioner, Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services

Dr. Lynn Noseworthy, Medical Officer of Health, Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit

Cynthia Olsen, Coordinator, Thunder Bay Drug Strategy

Dr. Janice B. Owen, BA, MSc, MD, CCFP, FCFP, Acting Medical Officer of Health and CEO, Huron County Health Unit

Chief Paul Pederson, Greater Sudbury Police Service

Dr. Don Pinksen, Physician, Guelph Community Health Centre

Kapri Rabin, Executive Director, Street Health, Toronto

Dr. Steve Reinhart, Physician, Guelph Community Health Centre

Research Group on Drug Use (RGDU), Toronto

Shirley Roberts, Executive Director, Parkdale Community Health Centre, Toronto

Angela Robertson, Executive Director, Queen West – Central Toronto Community Health Centre

Chief Murray Rodd, Peterborough Police Service

Don Roth, Chair, Waterloo Region Integrated Drug Strategy

Jackie Rumball, Nurse Practitioner, Guelph Community Health Centre

Dr. Rupinder S. Sahsi, Attending Emergency Physician, Grand River and St. Mary's General Hospitals, Kitchener

Dr. Rosana (Pellizzari) Salvaterra, Medical Officer of Health, Peterborough County-City Health Unit

Silvia Samsa, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke

Hersh Sehdev, Executive Director, Kingston Community Health Centres

Dr. Leslie Shanks, Medical Director, Inner City Health Associates, Toronto

Bill Sinclair, Executive Director, St. Stephen's Community House, Toronto

Sonya Spencer, Executive Director, John Howard Society of Toronto

Denise C. Squire, Executive Director, Woolwich Community Health Centre, St. Jacobs region

Dr. Paula Stewart, MD FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health, Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit

Dr. Monir Taha, Associate Medical Officer of Health, Halton Region Health Department

Peggy Taillon, President and CEO, Canadian Council on Social Development

Dr. Robert Tremblay, Physician, Guelph Community Health Centre

Brian Turner, Chair, Carleton Place Drug Strategy

Dr. Michael Varenbut, Co-CEO, Ontario Addiction Treatment Centres

Dr. Dan Werb, Director, International Centre for Science in Drug Policy; Research Scientist, Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto

Elis Ziegler, Manager, Toronto Drop-In Network

Cc: Dr. Bob Bell, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Sharon Lee Smith, Associate Deputy Minister, Policy and Transformation, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Jackie Wood, Interim Associate Deputy Minister, Health Promotion

Dr. David Williams, Interim Chief Medical Officer of Health
Roselle Martino, Executive Director, Public Health Division, Ministry of Health and Long-Term
Care

¹ Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario (2015). Unpublished, Data for opioid-detected deaths among Ontarians, 2009-2013, Personal communication, May 2015.

² Ontario Ministry of Transportation (2015). *Ontario Road Safety Annual Report 2012*. Ministry of Transportation, Road Safety Research Office, Toronto, 2015.

³ Ontario Drug Policy Research Network (2015). *Opioid Prescribing and Opioid-Related Hospital Visits in Ontario*. Toronto, July 2015.

⁴ Zu. Y.S., Kastner, M., Harada, L. et al (2014). Anaphylaxis-related deaths in Ontario: a retrospective review of cases from 1986 to 2011. *Allergy, Asthma and Clinical Immunology* 10(1), 38.

⁵ Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario (2015).

⁶ Ontario Ministry of Transportation (2015).

⁷ Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinator's Network of Ontario (2015). *Prescription for Life*. Available at: www.drugstrategy.ca.

⁸ Association of Local Public Health Agencies of Ontario (2015). Provincial Availability of Naloxone. *ALPHA Resolution A15-5*, Ottawa, June 2015. Available at: <http://www.alphaweb.org/news/237068/2015-ALPHA-Resolutions.htm>.