

Municipal Drug Strategy Coordinators Network of Ontario
c/o Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy
176 Wyndham St. N
Guelph, ON N1H 8N9

March 30, 2021

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 implement Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) throughout the province to save lives and improve the health, safety and well-being of people who use drugs in Ontario. Capping the number of CTS in the province creates regional disparities that do not align with communities' needs. We, therefore, request that CTS be made available in every municipality that requests one. Opening CTS throughout the province will have a significant impact in averting the escalating number of preventable drug overdose deaths in Ontario.

From 2017 to 2019, there was a significant increase in opioid-related emergency department visits and deaths in Ontario. In this 2-year period, the rate of opioid-related emergency department visits grew from 54.6/100,000 to 71.6/100,000.¹ Opioid-related death rates have also increased across the province over the last decade, and the crisis has further worsened over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019 there were 1,509 recorded opioid-related deaths in Ontario.¹ Preliminary data shows 2,081 confirmed opioid-related deaths from January to November 2020 in Ontario.² This is a 52 percent increase compared to the same time period in 2019.

COVID-19 has had a profound health and social impacts on all Ontarians, particularly people who use substances. Pandemic-related factors contributing to the rise in opioid-related deaths are complex and numerous. They include physical and social isolation due to public health recommendations, reduced access to and enrolment in social and addiction services, and an increasingly toxic unregulated drug supply. This has resulted in an increase in fatal overdoses where no one was present to intervene.²

Research shows that providing harm reduction services leads to a reduction in drug-related fatalities. Consumption and Treatment Services offer a wide range of benefits to people who use drugs, including a reduction in the number of drug-related deaths, a reduction in unsafe consumption

¹Public Health Ontario. (2021). Opioid-related morbidity and mortality in Ontario. Retrieved from <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/substance-use/interactive-opioid-tool#/trends>

² Officer of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, 2021

practices and infectious diseases, and increased access to health and social services. Consumption and Treatment Services save lives and are a cost-effective means of addressing the complexities of drug use.

The MDSCNO urges the Government of Ontario to do the following:

- Remove the current cap of 21 Consumption and Treatment Services permitted for Ontario and utilize the Federal Class Exemption granted to provinces during the COVID-19 pandemic (subsection 56(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act) to increase the availability of these lifesaving services throughout the province.
- Create and fund an Urgent Public Health Need Site (UPHNS) program for Ontario to facilitate implementation of these lifesaving services within a variety of settings in a timely way.

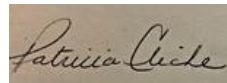
The MDSCNO represents 39 municipalities and regions throughout Ontario.

Should you have any questions, please contact any of the signatories below.

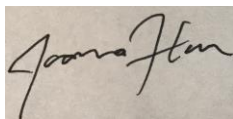
Sincerely,



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



Patricia Cliche
Chairperson, Community Drug Strategy
North Bay and Area
On behalf of the Municipal Drug Strategies
Coordinators Network of Ontario



Joanna Han
Coordinator of the Waterloo Region Integrated
Drugs Strategy
On behalf of the Municipal Drug Strategies
Coordinators Network of Ontario