

January 31, 2024

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**Drug Strategy  
Network of Ontario**

Re: Prescribed Safer Supply - Substance Use and Addiction Program

The Honourable Mark Holland, Minister of Health

The Honourable Ya'ara Saks, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Associate Minister of Health

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honourable Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health

The Honourable Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister for Mental Health and Addictions

The Honourable Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General of Ontario

Dear Ministers,

On behalf of the Drug Strategy Network of Ontario (DSNO), we appreciate and remain grateful for the federal funding that established and evaluated prescribed safer supply projects in select Canadian communities. The DSNO is deeply concerned that prescribed safer supply initiatives preventing and/or mitigating both individual and community harms, including deaths, are at-risk of defunding, at a time when the evidence<sup>1</sup> supports additional investments to support expansion. In Ontario an estimated 11,380 people are suspected to have died from drug poisoning in just the last 3 years, 2021-2023<sup>2</sup>.

Established in 2008, the DSNO is an extensive, multi-sectoral network of municipal and First Nations drug strategies grounded in a 4-pillar approach with efforts in prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement-justice systems. Members of the Network have expertise in evidence-informed initiatives preventing and/or reducing the harms

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see:

- a. Safer Opioid Supply: A Rapid Review of the Evidence. Ontario Drug Policy Research Network, 2023.
- b. Emerging Evidence Brief on Prescribed Safer Supply and Client Experiences. National Safer Supply Community of Practice, 2023.
- c. Effect of Risk Mitigation Guidance for opioid and stimulant dispensations on mortality and acute care visits during dual public health emergencies: retrospective cohort study. Slaunwhite A, Min J E, Palis H, Urbanoski K, Pauly B, Barker B et al. British Medical Journal, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Suspect Drug-Related and Drug Toxicity Deaths in Ontario. Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, January 2024.

that can arise from consuming regulated and/or unregulated substances. Unique in North America, the DSNO stretches across the urban, rural, and remote regions of Ontario, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the diverse challenges faced by communities.

Prescribed safer supply programs have demonstrated efficacy in providing multiple, concurrent benefits across several domains of significant interest in local municipalities, among service providers, residents, and others. For example, the DSNO and others welcome the reductions in overdose emergencies, in homelessness, and in the harms that can arise from self-managing withdrawal via unregulated drug markets. Improvements in physical and mental health for people typically disconnected from health and social services are significant achievements to scale up. Prohibiting expansion, and/or defunding existing safer supply programs, seems certain to compromise both individual and community health and safety, and exacerbate the burden of the worst drug poisoning crisis in Ontario's history for residents, public, and not-for-profit service providers.

Prescribed safer supply programs have established their place as part of a continuum of care options in realizing a comprehensive approach to issues of substance use. Urgent, life-saving funding is possible, and essential.

The DSNO is available to lend our substantial experience and expertise on drug-related issues and strategies in support of the development and/or implementation of evidence-informed initiatives in law, policy, and funding. Together our collective efforts can mitigate the impacts of the drug poisoning tragedy for the benefit of all residents.

If the DSNO can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us at [ontariodrugstrategies@gmail.com](mailto:ontariodrugstrategies@gmail.com). We appreciate your attention to this pressing matter, and look forward to your support assisting communities across Ontario.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Parkinson', with a small dot at the end of the signature.

Michael Parkinson,

Drug Strategy Network of Ontario

cc:

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

Pierre Poilievre, MP, Leader of the Opposition

Dr. Stephen Ellis, MP, Health Critic

Todd Doherty, MP, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Critic

Laila Goodridge, MP, Addictions Critic

Raquel Dancho, MP, Public Safety Critic

Jagmeet Singh, MP, Leader, Intergovernmental Affairs Critic

Gord Johns, MP, Mental Health and Harm Reduction Critic

Peter Julian, MP, Public Safety Critic

Don Davies, MP, Health Critic

Mike Morrice, MP

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Marit Stiles, MPP, Leader of the Opposition, Intergovernmental Affairs Critic

France G  linas, MPP, Health Critic

Lisa Gretzky, MPP, Mental Health and Addictions Critic, Poverty and Homelessness  
Reduction Critic

John Vanthof, MPP, Solicitor General Critic

Mike Schreiner, MPP

Adil Shamji, MPP, Member - Standing Committee on Social Policy

Alliance for Healthier Communities

Association of Local Public Health Agencies

Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Canadian Drug Policy Coalition

Federation of Canadian Municipalities

HIV Legal Network

Ontario's Big City Mayors

Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police

National Safer Supply Community of Practice

Rural Ontario Municipal Association