

Open Letter to Canada's Health Minister
Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P.
April 12, 2021

Dear Minister Hajdu:

April 14 marks a somber anniversary. It will be five years since B.C. declared a public health emergency after 200 people died of opioid overdoses.

Last year, 1716 people lost their lives to deadly drugs in B.C. - more than the total number of Covid deaths. And more than car crashes, suicides, and prescription drug overdoses, combined.

Indigenous people have been the hardest hit by this preventable tragedy. Last year, the rate of overdose deaths among First Nations was 5.5 times higher than others. They were all people we loved and cared about, our family, friends, coworkers, and partners.

We can no longer wait for governments to act.

On April 14, a coalition of community-based drug-user organizations will do what our governments have refused to do. Safe and free heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine will be distributed to pre-screened people who use drugs (PWUD) in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

On this day, lives will be saved because these drugs won't be laced with fentanyl or other dangerous substances. The drugs will not be given to children, only pre-screened and verified adults, who would otherwise risk their lives buying illicit drugs off the street.

This is not a radical act. In fact, last year you wrote the Provincial Ministers of Health, asking for their support "for programs that provide greater access to a safer, pharmaceutical-grade alternative to the toxic street supply." (1)

B.C. responded with a safe supply program, and now doctors can legally prescribe pharmaceutical alternatives to illicit drugs.

The trouble is, stigma prevents many PWUD from going to medical professionals, doctors often deny them prescriptions and legal drugs don't match the strength of illicit drugs.

A safe facility where PWUD receive clean, regulated drugs for their personal use is based on a Compassion Club model. It was recommended two years ago by the B.C. Centre for Substance Use, the provincial agency responsible for setting the standards for addiction medicine.

B.C. has asked the federal government to allow this province to become the first in Canada to decriminalize possession of small amounts of illicit drugs.

As the federal health minister, you have the power to make it happen, with an exemption to Section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA.)

The scientific evidence is clear: a safe supply of drugs will save lives. You have acknowledged this. Academic institutions, police forces, B.C. Premier John Horgan, the Provincial Health Officer, Doctor Bonnie Henry (2,) and addictions medicine experts all recognize the need for a safe supply model.

Help us. Five more people die every single day and there is no time to waste.

As Health Minister, you have the power to immediately:

- 1) Facilitate, fund, and support de facto Compassion Clubs in B.C. that can legally distribute clean, safe drugs to pre-screened adults.**
- 2) Exempt all people who access or provide life-saving support at a Compassion Club from criminal consequences including charges of possession and trafficking. (Under Section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act)**

People who use drugs feel abandoned and have reached a breaking point.

Another death is unacceptable.

Signed,

Drug User Liberation Front

BC Association for People on Opiate Maintenance (BCAPOM)
BC /Yukon Association of Drug War Survivors (BCYADWS)
Brantford Substance Users Network
Canadian Association for Safe Supply (CASS)
Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs (CAPUD)
Coalition of Peers Dismantling the Drug War (CPDDW)
Coalition of Substance Users of the North (CSUN)
Drug User Membership (DRUM) Nanaimo
East Kootenay Network of People Who Use Drugs (EKNPUD)
Knowledging All Nations & Developing Unity (KANDU)
Maple Ridge Street Outreach Society (MRSOS)
Overdose Prevention Society
Peel Drug User Network
POUNDS Project Society
Rural Empowered Drug User Network (REDUN)
SOLID Outreach Society
Street Cats YYC
Toronto Overdose Prevention Society
Downtown Eastside SRO-Collaborative
Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy (CSSDP)
United Northern Drug Users (UNDU)
Vancouver Area Network Of Drug Users (VANDU)
Wild Women of the North (WWN)
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition
BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU)
Chief Don Tom, Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) Vice-President
Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer
Bruce Wallace, Scientist, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR)
Pacific AIDS Network (PAN)
Moms Stop the Harm (MSTH)
BC Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA)
Pivot Legal Society
Harm Reduction Nurses Association

[1] Letter from Minister of Health Hajdu to Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health and regulatory colleges (August 24, 2020)

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/minister-letter-treatment-safer-supply.html>

[2] Dr. Bonnie Henry, MD, MPH, FRCPC, Provincial Health Officer, Stopping the Harm, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/special-reports/stopping-the-harm-report.pdf>