

July 22, 2019

The Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, Minister of Health
Confederation Building
356
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister:

Re: The urgent need to secure supervised consumption services: An open letter to the federal Minister of Health

We write to you as organizations concerned about the health and welfare of people who use drugs.

Canada continues to experience an unprecedented overdose crisis, and while important efforts have been made to scale up access to supervised consumption services (SCS) in Canada, they remain insufficient to respond to the crisis. With a federal election in just a few months, we are particularly concerned about the future of existing life-saving SCS that operate with short-term ministerial exemptions from Canada's drug laws (i.e. 1–3 years). Some sites' exemptions will expire early 2020.¹ Twelve of these sites are located in Ontario, where at least 1467 people died of an overdose in 2018.²

Experience has shown how sensitive access to SCS, and to federal ministerial exemptions in particular, is to the political context.³ The threats to the scale-up of SCS in both Ontario and Alberta after changes in provincial government⁴ confirm our fears and the urgent need for the federal government to take action to secure existing services before the next election.

¹ Government of Canada, List of approved supervised consumption sites, July 2019. Available at www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/supervised-consumption-sites/status-application.html#scs-app.

² Government of Canada, National Report: Apparent Opioid-related Deaths in Canada, June 2019. Available at <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/datalab/national-surveillance-opioid-mortality.html>.

³ Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, *Overdue for a change: Scaling up supervised consumption services in Canada*, 2019. Available at www.aidslaw.ca/site/overdue-for-a-change-full-report/?lang=en.

⁴ J. Giovannetti, "Kenney government says it will be reviewing safe drug-use site, response plans to opioid crisis," *The Globe and Mail*, May 31, 2019.

In particular, we urge you to immediately:

- 1) issue five-year exemptions to new and current services without distinction between Supervised Consumption Sites and Overdose Prevention Sites, as both low-threshold and more comprehensive services are necessary to respond to the current crisis;
- 2) commit federal funding now to support the scale-up of SCS, with a particular priority for sites in jurisdictions where provincial governments are reluctant or unwilling to fund these life-saving services.

There is no end in sight of the overdose crisis that has already claimed more than 11,500 lives. There is no time to lose in securing services that your government describes as “helping to save lives and improve health.”⁵

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this issue. The lives of our family members, friends and loved ones are at stake.

Sincerely,

AIDS Saskatoon
Boyle McCauley Health Centre
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Direction 180
Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation
Dopamine
Fred Victor
L'Anonyme
Ottawa Inner City Health
Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre
PHS Community Services Society
Point de repères
Regent Park Community Health Centre
South Riverdale Community Health Centre
Sandy Hill Community Health Centre
St. Stephen's Community House
Street Health
The Works, Toronto Public Health

⁵ Government of Canada, Supervised consumption sites explained, August 2018. Available at www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/supervised-consumption-sites/explained.html.