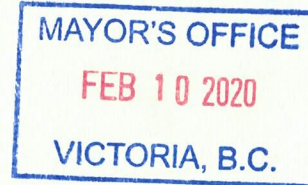




FEB 06 2020

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Her Worship Lisa Helps
Mayor of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC V8W 1P6



Dear Mayor Helps:

Thank you for your letter of November 12, 2019, in which you shared the resolutions on this year's Union of BC Municipalities agenda entitled: Safer Drug Supply to Save Lives (B171) and Observed Inhalation Sites for Overdose Prevention (B172).

I appreciate the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Honourable John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia, and apologize for the delay.

As you noted, British Columbians are experiencing unprecedented rates of overdose-related harm due to an unregulated drug supply that is unpredictable and highly toxic. A public health emergency of this magnitude and complexity necessitates a comprehensive response that includes both evidence-based and innovative approaches.

Over the past five years, the Government of British Columbia has committed a total of \$608 million to support an escalated response to the overdose emergency to save lives, reduce stigma, build a network of treatment and recovery services, create a supportive environment, advance prevention, and improve public safety.

People experiencing substance use related challenges deserve access to a full continuum of effective medical treatment options, including low-barrier options. That is why we are working with doctors, nurses, and pharmacists on improving care for people at risk of overdose. This includes actively pursuing legal, pharmaceutical alternatives to the highly-toxic unregulated drug supply that can be provided under medical supervision to save lives.

Work is underway in this area and rigorous evaluation of this work will help improve understanding of the feasibility of different models to reduce overdose-related harms and inform future decision-making. For example, the Portland Hotel Society – with the support of Vancouver Coastal Health, BC Housing, and the City of Vancouver – launched a tablet injectable opioid agonist treatment (TiOAT) pilot project in January 2019 whereby people at high risk of overdose have lower barrier access to as-needed medication for injection and/or oral use under medical supervision at the Molson Overdose Prevention Site.

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Preliminary findings highlight strong patient retention and connections to other health care services, as well as reduced drug-related harms; none of those accessing the pilot project reported having experienced an overdose or having been hospitalized since starting the program. In recognition of the immediate successes of this program, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions and the Ministry of Health approved funding in November 2019 to expand this program to two additional sites in Vancouver and Kelowna.

BC has increased access to injectable opioid agonist treatment (iOAT) in all health authorities with the exception of the Northern Health Authority. Clinics are in all high-need communities as determined by overdose surveillance data, including Surrey, Kelowna, Victoria and multiple Vancouver locations.

Ensuring British Columbians at risk of overdose can access supervised consumption and overdose prevention services remains a priority in the provincial response to the public health emergency. The Government of British Columbia funds regional health authorities to deliver supervised consumption and overdose prevention services in communities across the province. Regional health authorities are responsible for ensuring these services are delivered in a way that meets the needs of a given community. For example, Vancouver Coastal Health has established a women's-only overdose prevention site to meet the unique needs of that population.

I encourage the City of Victoria to work with Island Health to determine how overdose prevention and supervised consumption services can be delivered in a manner that meets the needs of people at risk of overdose in Victoria.

Currently, there are nine supervised consumption services and 22 standalone overdose prevention services throughout the province. In addition to standalone supervised consumption and overdose prevention services, there are other forms of overdose prevention services based in a wide range of settings. For example, in the Island Health region, there are several overdose prevention services based in housing settings. While there remain a number of barriers to facilitating supervised inhalation, our ministry is working with health authority partners to explore opportunities to address these.

Since its release in June 2019, we have seen tremendous progress with the initiatives and priority actions outlined in *A Pathway to Hope: A roadmap for making mental health and addictions care better for people in British Columbia* (the Roadmap). A digital version of the Roadmap is available online here:

https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BCMentalHealthRoadmap_2019.pdf

Integrated child and youth teams are currently being implemented in Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows and Comox Valley School Districts and will be in three additional school districts this year. The teams are comprised of mental health and substance use practitioners, school personnel, peer support and Indigenous-specific support workers, and provide wrap-around care in schools, communities and homes.

The Roadmap also saw commitments be made to the expansion of Foundry to increase the number to 19 centres province-wide. In October 2019, Foundry launched an expression of interest for communities across BC. Of the 40 received submissions, 19 communities were shortlisted by two independent panels of young people, families/caregivers, and subject matter experts. By March 2020, Foundry will identify a minimum of six communities and lead agencies to open new Foundry centres.

Access to mental health and substance use counselling services is increasing across the province, in part, thanks to the development of a Community Counselling Grant program. The program, developed by our ministry in partnership with the Community Action Initiative, will provide \$10 million over three years to support community-based adult counselling programs.

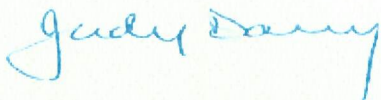
A major milestone was reached in December 2019 with the new Assisted Living Regulation. This regulation includes new requirements to increase the health and safety of supportive recovery residences. Moving forward, we are continuing to work together to develop service standards for supportive recovery programs with a focus on best practices in the areas of health and safety, program delivery, and capacity building.

We are exploring all options to save lives, help people stabilize, and connect them to treatment and recovery. Municipalities like the City of Victoria, a strong ally in the overdose response, play an important role in facilitating the provision of essential evidence-based health services related to the delivery of substance use treatment and harm reduction services.

I look forward to further opportunities to engage all municipalities in dialogue about the scope and impact of municipal bylaws pertaining to the provision of evidence-based health services, including harm reduction and pharmaceutical alternatives to the unregulated drug supply.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

Yours sincerely,



Judy Darcy
Minister

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