

October 5, 2017

An Open Letter to Mayor Jim Watson, City of Ottawa

I am writing this as the Executive Director of the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, a coalition of organizations and individuals working to improve Canada's approach to drugs. The Coalition works to support civil society and government efforts to respond to drug related harms in our communities by taking a public health approach that respects the human rights of Canadians. As you know, Canada is currently experiencing its worst drug overdose death crisis in history. Just this week, the Province of Ontario has announced the creation of an Opioid Emergency Task Force to strengthen Ontario's response to the deadly overdose crisis that is expanding across Canada. We welcome this development and hope that this task force can engage the voices of municipalities, as those at the municipal level are well positioned to assist with the emergency response to improve the health and safety of citizens that is required to address this crisis.

We also hope that the Task Force can assist municipalities to support the emergency efforts that are being implemented by citizens' organizations to prevent overdose deaths in the absence of supervised consumption services that are being planned in various municipalities. These emergency responses are community-driven efforts to engage a highly marginalized and at-risk population of people who are vulnerable to death by overdose because of the extremely toxic drug supply that exists at this time. The efforts by Overdose Prevention Ottawa to provide safety by staffing a "pop up" overdose prevention site in a highly risky environment mirrors efforts by other grassroots organizations across the country. This mobilization of citizens in communities heavily impacted by the overdose emergency has been impressive and we urge civic leaders and officials to engage OPS Ottawa service providers, a volunteer effort to provide emergency life-saving services, as well as citizens on all sides of the issue in dialogue on the best way to mobilize a response to the overdose crisis.

In British Columbia, we have over 20 OPS sites operating in three of the five health regions and they are essential points of safety and contact for people at risk of death from overdose. There is good communication and support among the OPS services, regional health authorities, police and the public, the majority of whom are supportive of all efforts to save lives during this crisis. We hope you and your Council will find ways to bring people together on this important issue and work towards a safer Ottawa for all of your citizens.

The toxic drug market has created a need to urgently re-orient our harm reduction efforts across the country. We hope that Ottawa develops a robust response to the overdose crisis in the coming months and will applaud all efforts to do so.

Thank you for your attention,



Donald MacPherson
Executive Director
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition