



Canadian Federation of University Women
Markham/Unionville

January 9, 2022

The Honourable Paul Calandra, M.P.P.
Minister of Legislative Affairs and
Government House Leader
Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A2

Re: Canada's Opioid Crisis – Declarations and Action Plans

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of CFUW Markham/Unionville, with 147 members in Markham, Unionville and surrounding areas. We are an affiliate of the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) that works to improve the status of women and to promote human rights, public education, social justice and peace in Canada and abroad.

There is a pressing need to address the opioid crisis in Ontario. We recognize the work that the Ontario Government is currently performing including its Ontario Naloxone Program which provides naloxone through community-based agencies but there is more to be done on this urgent issue.

According to Public Health Ontario this crisis only deepened during the pandemic with 2,426 opioid-related deaths occurring in 2020 in Ontario, a 60% rise from 1,517 deaths in 2019. There was a 79% increase in monthly opioid-related deaths in 2020, from 139 deaths in February 2020 to 249 deaths in December 2020. 1,109 opioid-related deaths during the pandemic occurred among people aged 25 to 44, representing an increase of 501 deaths compared to before the pandemic.

We urge the Ontario government to work together with the federal, indigenous, and municipal governments to focus their opioid crisis efforts not just on corrections but health care as well through, but not limited to the following:

1. working with multi-discipline stakeholders and professional health and security organizations to implement alternatives to criminal justice approaches, including evidence-based decriminalization of drugs for personal use;
2. working with stakeholders, including health practitioners and counsellors, on best practices in pain management and/or opioid addiction;

3. increasing support and psychosocial services for vulnerable people by increasing the number of trained professionals available to address the opioid crisis;
4. increasing and improving training of first responders, counsellors and public security personnel to better recognize and address addiction, and the associated stigma, by integrating such training into the core curriculum at post-secondary institutions and ongoing professional development;
5. establishing a cross-Canada electronic prescription drug registry

Based on the current scientific and medical knowledge and experience, the treatment for opioid addiction and available remedies need to be made more immediately accessible to those in need. The harms from opioid use, whether from prescriptions or from street drugs, must be successfully alleviated by health and security personnel, counsellors and first responders. It behooves society to provide better pain management and addiction support for persons **before they** find themselves at the mercy of their chronic dependence.

Use of opioids for personal use must, of necessity, be decriminalised in order to reduce stigma, and encourage the seeking of assistance in cases of crisis. The current influx of newer, more powerful synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, continues to overwhelm law enforcement, acute care facilities, and inter-disciplinary treatment practitioners. Additionally, a reduction in adverse effects from opioid use would be considerably improved by the establishment of a cross-Canada electronic prescription monitoring system available to doctors and pharmacists.

We ask that you support, encourage and take comprehensive action to mitigate the impact of the opioid crisis for the health and overall well-being of Ontarians.

We look forward to your response outlining your position and the actions you plan to take to address this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Sandra Mallory
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Marg Esaw
President-CFUW Markham/Unionville

c.c The Honourable Doug Downey, M.P.P., Attorney General of Ontario
The Honourable Christine Elliott, M.P.P., Minister of Health and Deputy Premier
The Honourable Greg Rickford, M.P.P., Minister of Indigenous Affairs and
Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry