



January 5th, 2022

Dear Ms. Esaw,

Thank you for the letter you sent in December 2021, addressed to the Honourable Helena Jaczek, Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. I am responding to your concerns on behalf of the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada.

I can assure you that opioid crisis is a priority for this department. Indigenous Services Canada's approach to the opioid public health crisis is collaborative with First Nations and Inuit communities, national Indigenous organizations, provinces and territories, professional organizations and other departments.

Indigenous Services Canada's approach to the opioid crisis is aligned with the four key pillars captured within the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy (prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and increasing the evidence base), and is guided by the [First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum](#), [Honouring our Strengths](#), and the [National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy](#). These frameworks, which were developed by Indigenous partners, outline a holistic approach to mental wellness that is grounded in culture and Indigenous-specific determinants of health.

Indigenous Services Canada has undertaken a number of naloxone-related activities to increase access to First Nations and Inuit communities, including bulk order purchases of both injectable naloxone and NARCAN™ nasal spray for distribution to Indigenous communities. Both injectable naloxone and NARCAN™ (naloxone) nasal spray are available as open benefits under Indigenous Services Canada's Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program. Suboxone and methadone are both available under Non-Insured Health Benefits for the treatment of opioid use disorder for eligible First Nations and Inuit. ISC continues to monitor and ensure naloxone availability in First Nations and Inuit communities across the country.

Indigenous Services Canada is currently funding wraparound services at 72 opioid agonist therapy sites (as of September 2021). This number will continue to grow



through the new investments outlined in Budget 2021 for Indigenous mental wellness services.

Indigenous Services Canada provides annual funding to support culturally relevant and community-based mental wellness supports for First Nations and Inuit. These investments are made to meet the immediate mental wellness needs of communities, to enhance the delivery of culturally-appropriate substance use treatment and prevention services in Indigenous communities with high needs, and to provide mental health, cultural, and emotional support to former Indian Residential School and Federal Indian Day School students and their families and those affected by the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This also includes supporting a network of 45 substance use treatment centres across Canada. The treatment centres provide a range of mainstream and culturally relevant approaches; access to inpatient, outpatient, and day treatment services; services for unique needs (e.g., programming for families, solvent or problematic drug use, and concurrent disorders); and are grounded in traditional culture. A number of treatment centres have developed virtual treatment and wellness programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent years, the Government of Canada has announced significant financial investments to help address the opioid crisis. Budget 2018 provided \$200 million over five years (2018/19 to 2022-23) and \$40 million per year ongoing to support new investments in substance use prevention and treatment services for First Nations and Inuit including funding to address the ongoing opioid crisis. The investment supports: opioid agonist therapy sites offering wraparound services; on the land activities; enhanced services across a network of 45 federally funded treatment centres; and, major renovations at over 20 of these centres.

To address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related public health measures on mental wellness in Indigenous communities, the Government of Canada announced on August 25, 2020, a one year investment of \$82.5M in mental health and wellness supports to help Indigenous communities adapt and expand mental wellness services, improving access and addressing growing demand.

Additionally, Budget 2021 provides \$16M over three years to support, enhance, and expand wraparound services at existing and new opioid agonist therapy sites, as part of a three year investment of \$597M for distinctions based mental wellness services.

The opioid crisis represents one of the most serious public health issues in Canada's recent history and Indigenous Services Canada will continue to work with Indigenous partners, provinces and territories, on a comprehensive and coordinated approach to



Indigenous Services
Canada

Services aux
Autochtones Canada

support Indigenous communities to address the opioid overdose crisis in their communities.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Tom Wong

Chief Medical Officer, Chief Science Officer and Director General / Médecin

hygiéniste en Chef, Conseiller scientifique en Chef et Directeur general

Office of Population & Public Health / Bureau de la Santé publique et de la population

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch / Direction générale de la santé des Premières nations et des Inuits

Indigenous Services Canada / Services aux Autochtones Canada