



Canadian Federation of University Women
Markham/Unionville

December 8, 2021

The Honourable Helena Jaczek, P.C.
Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency
for Southern Ontario
House of Commons
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

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

Dear Minister Jaczek,

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.

We commend all the work the Federal government has done to date as summarized in the June 2021 Federal Actions on Opioids but there is more to be done on this urgent issue.

One in five Canadians experiences chronic pain and significantly delayed access to treatment. Data from the Government of Canada show that there were 21,174 opioid-related deaths, and 24,671 hospitalizations, between January 2016 and December 2020. Seventy-seven percent of the deaths were attributable to 20- to 49-year-olds and three quarters of these were males.

We urge the federal, provincial, territorial, indigenous, and municipal governments to work together to focus the 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 Canadian society.

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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President – CFUW Markham/Unionville

cc: The Honourable David Lametti, P.C., Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., Minister of Health
The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, P.C., Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health
The Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario