

Dear Ms. Mallory:

Thank you for your correspondence, sent on behalf of the Markham/Unionville Canadian Federation of University Women's Club, concerning the opioid crisis. Please excuse the delay in responding.

Our government recognizes the need for action to end the growing number of opioid-related deaths across Canada. In December 2016, an updated drug strategy for Canada was announced. Since then, the federal government has been building a new approach to drug policy by working collaboratively with communities, provinces and territories, and key stakeholders such as addictions experts, the medical community, first responders, Indigenous groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and Canadians with lived experience. The new Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy formally restores harm reduction as a key pillar of Canada's drug strategy alongside the existing pillars of prevention, treatment, and enforcement.

Furthermore, the Government of Canada is coordinating a pan-Canadian response to the opioid crisis, which includes leading, supporting, and delivering a variety of initiatives to advance actions in the areas of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement. In 2020, the Government provided over \$2 million to evaluate program implementation as well as the impacts of safer supply pilot projects and supervised consumption sites across Canada in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The federal government also invested \$150 million for an Emergency Treatment Fund for provinces and territories to improve access to evidence-based treatment services.

Budget 2021 provided an additional \$116 million over two years for the Substance Use and Addictions Program, building on \$66 million invested in 2020. The program contributes funding for community-level projects with innovative approaches to harm reduction, treatment, and prevention. In March 2021, my colleague the Honourable Patty Hajdu, the then Minister of Health, announced \$20 million in funding through the program for the distribution of free naloxone kits and for opioid overdose training to support communities that have been particularly affected by the opioid overdose crisis.

In Canada, the importation, production, and distribution of opioids, including fentanyl, is punishable by a maximum term of life in prison, which gives sentencing judges the ability to impose the most serious punishment available. In addition, Canadian courts treat fentanyl trafficking very seriously and impose significant terms of imprisonment even on low-level and first-time traffickers. Courts have acknowledged that sentences for opioid-related criminality must be more serious than for other hard drugs, given the substantial risks associated with opioid use. Appellate courts across the country have begun to increase sentencing ranges for those who traffic these dangerous substances.

As you may know, responsibility for Canada's drug policy rests with my colleague the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health, to whom I note you have sent a copy of your correspondence.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

The Honourable David Lametti, P.C., Q.C., M.P.
(he/him)
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada