



The Corporation of the District of Saanich | Mayor's Office

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October 5, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

**VIA EMAIL: pm@pm.gc.ca**

Dear Prime Minister:

Re: Opioid Drug Crisis and Overdoses

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On September 14, 2020, Saanich Council considered a Report to Council from Mayor Haynes and resolved as follows:

*"That Council write to the Offices of the Prime Minister, the Premier, and the Federal and Provincial Ministers of Finance, Health, Mental Health and Addictions and Municipal Affairs and Housing, requesting they commit to providing adequate funding, new policy frameworks and legislative changes to effectively and holistically address the opioid crisis, mental health issues and their connections to homelessness in the municipalities in British Columbia and Canada and this approach include the decriminalization of controlled substances for personal use and the provision of a safe supply of opioids"*

Saanich greatly appreciates the support the Federal government has shown in ebbing the opioid drug crisis by providing \$2M for a safer supply pilot project in Island Health.

On September 16, British Columbia announced the provision of expansion of access to safer prescription alternatives to the toxic drug supply. New policy frameworks will allow access to substance-use services, including harm reduction, treatment, counselling and mental health supports and recovery-oriented services.

On behalf of Saanich Council, please consider this request to slow the opioid public health emergency through providing further funding, new policy frameworks, and legislative changes outlined above, including decriminalization of controlled substances for personal use.

A copy of the report and excerpt of the draft meeting minutes are enclosed for reference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'F. Haynes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Fred Haynes

Mayor

Enclosures

cc: Saanich Council  
Paul Thorkelsson, CAO

## Rachel Mattiuz

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**From:** Harris, Natasha (HC/SC) <natasha.harris@canada.ca> on behalf of CSD DGO / BDG DSC (HC/SC) <hc.csddgo-bdgdsc.sc@canada.ca>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 28, 2021 8:08 AM  
**To:** Rachel Mattiuz  
**Subject:** (External Email) RE: Opioid Drug Crisis and Overdoses

**This email sent from outside the District of Saanich. Use caution if message is unexpected or sender is not known to you.**

Dear Mayor Haynes,

Thank you for your correspondence dated October 22, 2020, addressed to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Minister Patty Hajdu, and other federal and provincial leaders concerning the federal government's response to the overdose crisis. I also wish to acknowledge the previous correspondence received from Mayor Fred Haynes on October 5, 2020. We have carefully reviewed the report from the District of Saanich dated September 4, 2020, as well as the excerpt of Special Council meeting minutes from September 14, 2020. I have been asked to respond to you directly. I sincerely apologize for the delay in responding.

Thank you for sharing your concerns and recommendations with us. Our approach to substance use issues has been comprehensive and collaborative, guided by our federal drug strategy – the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy (CDSS). The CDSS takes a public health-focused approach, and lays out our framework for evidence-based actions to reduce the harms associated with substance use in Canada. It includes four key pillars – prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement.

Since 2016, the Government of Canada has taken urgent action to address the opioid overdose crisis through significant investments of over \$600 million as well as legislative and regulatory action. This includes working with provinces and territories to improve access to harm reduction services such as supervised consumption sites, increase access to pharmaceutical-grade medications, raise awareness of the risks of opioids, and remove barriers to treatment, including [stigma](#). Recently, we have provided an additional \$66 million over two years, starting in 2020-21, to support community-based organizations responding to substance use issues, including to help them provide frontline services in a COVID-19 context.

In addition, through Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program, the Government of Canada is supporting 11 projects in providing a flexible safer supply of pharmaceutical-grade medications for people with opioid use disorder in British Columbia, Ontario and New Brunswick. These investments will help provide pathways to care and treatment. Findings from these initiatives will contribute to the evidence base to support the scaling up of effective models. Examples of funded projects include:

- South Riverdale Community Health Centre and Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre (Toronto, Ontario) were provided approximately \$1.6M to help people access pharmaceutical-grade medications and increase engagement with health care and social services to foster better health outcomes.



- The London InterCommunity Health Centre (London, Ontario) was provided more than \$6.5 million to deliver a safer supply program that will help reduce harms related to the toxic illegal drug supply by providing prescribed opioids to patients with opioid use disorder during the pandemic and beyond.
- The Vancouver Island Health Authority was provided approximately \$2 million for an innovative project that will provide pharmaceutical-grade medication as an alternative to the toxic illegal drug supply for people in Cowichan Valley who have not responded to other forms of treatment for opioid use disorder.

On August 24, 2020, the Minister of Health sent a letter to Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health and regulatory colleges to encourage them all to provide people who use drugs with a full spectrum of care options, including access to a safer supply of drugs. You can read the letter here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/minister-letter-treatment-safer-supply.html>.

The Government of Canada will also continue to encourage the formation of partnerships between law enforcement and health and social services to help divert people who use drugs away from the criminal justice system and towards appropriate health services and social supports. For example, in May 2017, the Government of Canada introduced the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act*. The Act provides some legal protection for individuals who seek emergency help during an overdose. In addition, Health Canada has provided three-year funding for a project in Peterborough, Ontario, to develop a multi-sector response, with a team dedicated to caring for people at risk of experiencing overdoses, in order to direct people away from the justice system and into care. On August 18, 2020, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada issued guidance to prosecutors directing that alternatives to prosecution should be considered for simple possession offences, except when there are serious mitigating circumstances. This policy is available at <https://www.ppsc-sppc.gc.ca/eng/pub/fpsd-sfpg/fps-sfp/tpd/p5/ch13.html>.

The Government of Canada is further supporting those who are most vulnerable during this pandemic by investing \$500 million towards health care, including support for Canadians experiencing challenges with substance use, mental health, or homelessness. This investment is part of the more than \$19 billion invested through the [Safe Restart Agreement](#) to help provinces and territories safely restart their economies and ensure Canadians have the support they need in these challenging times.

We remain committed to addressing problematic substance use with a public health approach, and to continue working closely with all levels of government. In addition, we will continue to work with civil society organizations, first line responders, academics, people with lived and living experience and other key stakeholders to assess options that could better support the needs of people who use drugs during this difficult time. For example, Health Canada officials continue to engage with the British Columbia government, the City of Vancouver, local service providers, and others, to provide support and assist in overdose response efforts that address local and regional needs.

The overdose crisis is a complex public health issue and we recognize that no single organization or level of government can solve this situation alone. Thank you again for taking the time to share your views and recommendations with us.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Saxe  
Director General  
Controlled Substances Directorate  
Health Canada