



URBAN PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK
RÉSEAU CANADIEN POUR LA SANTÉ URBAINE

July 26, 2011

SECRETARIAT

#104 West Tower
Coronation Plaza
14310 – 111 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5M 3Z7

The Honorable Leona Aglukkaq, MP
Minister of Health
House of Commons
460 Confederation Building
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Secretariat@uphn.ca

Dear Minister Aglukkaq:

780.342.0186

RE: Harm Reduction Strategies

I am writing on behalf of the Urban Public Health Network (UPHN) whose membership is comprised of the Medical Officers of Health of 19 large urban centres in Canada. Combined these cities represent approximately half the population in Canada.

VICTORIA

VANCOUVER

SURREY

CALGARY

EDMONTON

SASKATOON

REGINA

WINNIPEG

LONDON

HAMILTON

PEEL

TORONTO

OTTAWA

MONTRÉAL

LONGUEUIL

QUÉBEC

HALIFAX

ST. JOHN'S

Our concern relates to Canada's Drug Strategy. It is recognized that for the strategy to be successful efforts need to be comprehensive and widespread to prevent the misuse of illicit drugs, to improve treatment, rehabilitation as well as care and support. As public health practitioners our focus is on prevention of disease and its transmission through the implementation of harm reduction activities. Harm reduction was previously included as one of the four pillars in the national strategy on illicit drugs. The WHO also endorses harm reduction as a component of a comprehensive strategy on illicit drugs.

However, in 2006 the Government of Canada removed harm reduction as a pillar of the Canadian National Drug Strategy which significantly impacted the *Insite* facility in B.C. In spite of evidence of its effectiveness in reducing harm and health risks associated with drug use to both users and the surrounding community, there appears to be lack of commitment to this type of harm reduction activity. Providing medical supervision of illicit drug consumption is a health service which prevents disease transmission and drug overdose. Furthermore, health, social, justice and enforcement costs are reduced. Large urban centres are home to many illicit drug users and public health needs the ability to respond to local needs with appropriate, evidence-based interventions such as supervised injection sites and needle exchange programs both of which reduce harm. Illicit drug users often do not access health services and the availability of harm reduction services can lead to the use of primary care and treatment services for this population.

On behalf of the UPHN membership, I urge the Government of Canada to

- a) reinstate harm reduction as one of the pillars of Canada's strategy on illicit drugs, and
- b) commit to evidence informed policy with respect to supervised drug injection

Yours sincerely,

G. Predy, MD, FRCP
Medical Officer of Health on behalf of the
Urban Public Health Network