



Via email: cfuwbccouncilpresident@gmail.com

1211302

December 16, 2021

Barbara DuMoulin
President
CFUW BC

Dear Barbara DuMoulin:

Thank you for your email of October 14, 2021, sharing the Canadian Federation of University Women's resolution titled *Canada's Opioid Crisis*. As Minister for the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Honourable John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia. I apologize for the delayed response.

Our government and our ministry are committed to creating a system of care that works for everyone, no matter who they are, where they are, or how much money they make. The goal is to transform the way mental health and substance use care are provided in British Columbia. Priority actions include improving the substance use system of care, escalating the provincial response to the illicit drug toxicity crisis, pursuing decriminalization, and increasing access to a safer supply.

We have been working hard to the fix gaps in the system and to build a comprehensive, accessible system of care for mental health and addictions where there wasn't one in BC for far too long.

Premier John Horgan has provided a new [ministry mandate](#) for our work, which will help us accelerate our response to the illicit drug toxicity crisis. This includes helping prescribers connect more people to safe prescription alternatives to the toxic illicit drug supply, expanding the number of mental health intervention teams in BC, working to enhance accountability and quality of treatment and recovery services, expanding availability of substance use treatment beds, and pursuing decriminalization for people who possess small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use.

We have already scaled up our response to the toxic drug crisis by:

- doubling the number overdose prevention sites across the province;
- launching a new prescribed safe supply policy;
- increasing the number of outreach teams, nurses, and social workers to connect more people to treatment;

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- connecting more people to safer alternatives to the toxic drug supply by adding registered nurses and psychiatric nurses to the list of approved prescribers;
- launching the Lifeguard App, to help prevent drug poisoning related harms in people using alone;
- adding 100 new adult treatment beds and doubling the number of youth treatment beds available; and,
- investing a historic half a billion dollars into mental health and addictions care through Budget 2021, including \$330 million to provide a full spectrum of treatment and recovery services, including funding 195 new treatment beds.

We know the devastating effect criminalization of illicit drugs has had on people experiencing substance use related harm and addiction, which is why in November 2021, we officially submitted an application to the federal government for a Section 56 exemption to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*.

This is complex work and we want to make sure we get it right. To help bridge the gap to decriminalization, we are supporting provincial solutions that encourage policing partners to take a harm reduction approach. This sees that criminal charges are not pursued for “simple possession” and that police are able to focus instead on prioritizing drug trafficking and the supply of illegal drugs.

We also recognize there are other significant systemic barriers that can prevent people from accessing the care they need and deserve. Stigma has been identified as a substantial barrier for people when accessing care for anxiety, depression, substance use, and addiction. Addressing these barriers is a key part of [*A Pathway to Hope*](#) and our ultimate goal of accessible, quality care for everyone.

We know there is a lot of work still to be done, but we are committed to doing the work that needs to be done to build a robust, culturally safe system of care for mental health and addictions in BC.

Thank you again for taking the time to write in and share your thoughts.

Best wishes,



Sheila Malcolmson
Minister

pc: Honourable John Horgan, Premier