



Joe Cressy 周凱捷

City Councillor | Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina

January 18, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Government of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister:

I am writing in my role as Chair of the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel, which is a multi-sectoral group providing oversight and strategic advice to the implementation of our municipal drug strategy. The Toronto Drug Strategy (TDS) provides a comprehensive approach to alcohol and other drugs based on the four integrated components of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement. Our strategy is built on a foundation of co-operation and collaboration across a broad range of sectors, including health and enforcement.

We appreciate that these are early days in your mandate, but would like draw your attention to an important issue for Canadians. Over the last decade, the federal government has instituted many regressive measures as it relates to drug policy in Canada, resulting in negative health outcomes for people across our country. We are hopeful that a return to evidence-based policy making under your administration will benefit the health and safety of Canadians, and reinstate Canada's reputation on the international stage.

Governments around the world ground have used the "four pillar" policy framework of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement to effectively guide their drug strategies. As you may know, Canada's Drug Strategy was also based on this framework until the federal Conservatives replaced it with the National Anti-Drug Strategy (NADS). Under NADS, harm reduction was removed from the plan as was a focus on alcohol. The evidence-base for harm reduction is well-established. Canada was once a leader in advancing harm reduction policy and practice, and we need to build on those efforts working in concert with the global drug policy community. Alcohol is the most commonly used drug in our society, including for youth. The health and social costs related to the use of alcohol far exceed those for illicit drugs, and strategies to reduce the harms of alcohol use are critical to any comprehensive approach.

We therefore urge your government to reinstate an evidence-based "four pillar" federal strategy for all drugs, including alcohol, prescription drugs and illicit drugs. Federal leadership and action on these issues is urgently needed in Canada, and would align with and strengthen the work of many of the provinces, territories and municipalities across the country, including at the City of Toronto. We would also encourage you to seek broad, multi-sector input in the development of a federal drug strategy, including from people who use drugs.

The TDS Implementation Panel has advocated with the federal government on many issues over the last 10 years, most with little or no effect. We are encouraged by directions outlined in your Minister Mandate letters, and recent announcements, which align with some of our priorities, and would like to highlight some additional areas for action, specifically:

- A pressing issue in Toronto and across Canada is action to address the overdose crisis. We are pleased to see Health Canada expedite the approval of naloxone in non-prescription form. Broader availability of this life-saving medicine is urgently needed, including in non-injectable forms (i.e., intranasal). We would also like to see naloxone added to federal drug formularies to improve access for people with limited incomes. We also urge the creation of Good Samaritan legislation to help reduce barriers to people calling 911 during an overdose for fear of arrest by police.
- We need more equitable investments of federal resources across the areas of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement. We need to invest in upstream approaches to prevent harmful substance use and reduce harms for people who are using drugs. We also need to expand capacity and options in the treatment system. In Toronto we need residential treatment options for youth to ensure appropriate care and reduce the need for youth to travel outside Toronto, from their family and support networks.
- We need to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with substance use. Important work is happening through the Mental Health Commission of Canada; however, little is being done with respect to substance use. Stigma and discrimination affects all aspects of a person's life and creates barriers to accessing the health and social services, housing, education and employment opportunities that people need to stabilize their lives.
- Investments in affordable and supportive housing are urgently needed to help people stabilize their lives and to prevent further harm. Finding and maintaining housing, especially for people who are using drugs, is a significant challenge in the current market. Harm reduction housing options must be part of the solution.
- A focus on restorative justice measures as an alternative to incarceration will benefit communities generally and help address the over-incarceration of groups in our correctional system, in particular indigenous peoples. We also need to expand the focus beyond adults and youth who are in conflict with the law and target resources to help people before they get into trouble.



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- We need a repeal of mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes, which have been proven to be not only ineffective but expensive. Treatment-oriented approaches are more cost-effective than lengthy prison terms in addressing crime related to substance use.
- Additional investments are needed for drug treatment courts. This program has expanded across Canada to enable new courts to be added, but the level of funding remained the same. The result is that existing programs, including the Toronto Drug Treatment Court, have lost funding, which will reduce the number of program participants.

We are very interested in working with your government on these and other drug policy issues. This includes, of course, your commitment to legalize and regulate cannabis. These are important issues for our community, and we would appreciate an opportunity to provide input.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Councillor Joe Cressy
Chair, Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel

CC: Jane Philpott, Minister of Health
Jodi Wilson-Raybould, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
Gary Anandasangaree, MP, Scarborough-Rouge Park
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