



 MomsStopTheHarm
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 momsstoptheharm
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Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

Re: Upcoming election positions on the overdose and drug poisoning crisis

The overdose and drug poisoning crisis continues to be one of the most devastating public health emergencies of our lifetime, with 21,174 opioid-related deaths in the last five years alone.ⁱ Most of these deaths were preventable and they all resulted in immeasurable devastation for families and communities.

We are writing on behalf of Moms Stop The Harm, a network of Canadian families impacted by substance-use related harms and deaths, to ask what the Liberal Party would do to end this crisis, if re-elected. Specifically, we are interested in your party's position and proposed investment on the following six issues:

1. Decriminalization:

The criminalization of people who possess now-illegal substances for personal use is a government policy stance that directly contributes to people using and dying alone. It prevents people who feel that they want help with problematic drug use from seeking it and it perpetuates deadly stigma. These Canadian drug laws are rooted in racism and continue to disproportionately impact racialized Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. As such, the criminalization of people who use drugs is a barrier to reconciliation.

Question: Would your party decriminalize the personal possession of illegal drugs? Also, would your party legislate this change rather than relying on informal, incremental, and discretionary measures that fall short of real decriminalization?

2. Safe supply:

Thousands of people are dying from toxic drugs, more so than ever before, particularly since measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have isolated people from services and supports. The global pandemic has also disrupted supply routes of illegal substances, resulting in a more concentrated and contaminated supply.

Question: Would your party ensure that there is a safe supply of pharmaceutical alternatives to toxic street drugs? And, if so, what measures would you implement to ensure this is widely available?

3. Harm reduction:

Harm Reduction is grounded in a comprehensive scientific, trauma informed and human rights-based approach. The evidence is clear that harm reduction programs such as safe consumption sites, drug checking, overdose prevention and reversal services all work to prevent deaths and connect people who use substances to public health and social programs. These approaches are cost effective and have a positive impact on individual and community health.

Question: Would your party create a legal and policy environment that funds and champions evidence-based programs in order to facilitate the development and scaling up of harm reduction services Canada-wide, including in remote and rural areas and prisons?

4. Legal regulation:

Alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis are currently legally regulated in Canada, using controls to manage the vendor, the supply outlet, the product, and the purchaser, as appropriate. Drug regulation with a public health focus could provide safer access while protecting individuals and populations. Depending on the substance and potential harms and benefits, regulation could range from prescriptions to regulated outlets to licensed premises, with the aim of providing safer access for adults, while protecting children and youth.ⁱⁱ The status quo and prohibition have never worked. The catastrophic death rates we are currently seeing tell us that prohibition, as was the case with alcohol prohibition, adds to rather than prevents harms. Even the London School of Economics has declared the war on drugs a global failure.ⁱⁱⁱ

Question: Would your party move to legally regulate currently illegal drugs based on the best available evidence regarding harms and benefits, and as a step towards treating problematic drug use as a health issue?

5. Declaration of a national public health emergency:

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how public health measures and investments can prevent serious harms and loss of life, and yet, we have not seen the same evidenced-based approach or investment in Canada's other public health emergency, the overdose and drug poisoning crisis. To avoid past policy failures, any effective response must be guided by the people who are most affected and know best, that is, the people who use drugs and their families.

Question: Would your party declare the overdose crisis as a national public health emergency so that it is taken seriously and funded appropriately? Also, would you ensure that emergency measures are provided in all provinces and territories and guided by the people most affected?

6. Proposed budget relating to overdose crisis:

Our recent experience with COVID-19 has shown us that public health measures, while costly, are effective in saving not only lives but also tax dollars in the long run, as hospitalizations are avoided, economies protected and life spans are not cut short.^{iv}

Question: What funding would your party provide to scale-up prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services?

We firmly believe that any newly elected government should legislate change to failed drug policies and provide adequate funding to end the overdose and drug poisoning crisis. During the last federal election in 2019, such measures seemed largely out of reach given the positions of most parties. Fortunately, a great deal has changed in the interim and we know that the Liberal Party can afford to be bolder this time round. As you may know, many public health officers have spoken out in favour of decriminalization. Moreover, a recent Angus Reid opinion poll shows that a majority of Canadians support this move.^v Also, to date, close to 40 communities have passed MSTH's resolution calling on the federal government to develop a pan-Canadian overdose action plan that includes full consideration of decriminalization and legal regulation.^{vi} Other municipalities, such as Vancouver and Montreal, have passed their own related resolutions.

We urge you to listen to the communities, experts, and majority of Canadians who want action on the overdose crisis. It is time to deal with this national public health emergency which is killing our loved ones.

We look forward to your response to our questions and this urgent matter. Please send any reply to info@momsstoptheharm.com. Thank you.

Your truly,

Leslie McBain
Co-founder and Chair
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Moms Stop The Harm

Petra Schulz
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c.c. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health

ⁱ <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/>

ⁱⁱ Models of legal regulation explained <https://transformdrugs.org/drug-policy/models-of-regulation>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/war-on-drugs-a-global-failure-london-school-of-economics-says-1.2636263>

^{iv} <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/data-surveillance-research/measuring-impact-on-life-expectancy.html>

^v <https://angusreid.org/opioid-crisis-covid/>

^{vi} <https://www.momsstoptheharm.com/actions/2020/11/24/moms-stop-the-harm-takes-its-message-to-municipalities>