

MINISTRY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE

Cliff # 1134196

PREPARED FOR: Hon. Judy Darcy - **FOR INFORMATION**

TITLE: Medication Assisted Treatment - Working Group Recommendations

PURPOSE: To provide an overview of the Working Group report including key findings and recommendations and to provide advice on next steps

BACKGROUND:

British Columbians are experiencing unprecedented rates of overdose-related harms including death due to an unregulated drug supply that is unpredictable and highly-toxic. At least 1,514 people died from a suspected illicit drug overdose in 2018, an increase from 1,491 in 2017 and 992 in 2016. The rate of fentanyl detection in overdose deaths has increased from 4% in 2012 to 87% in 2018.ⁱ

In December 2018, the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions brought together a group of representatives from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC, the College of Pharmacists of BC, the College of Nursing Professionals, and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer (the Working Group) to identify innovative approaches and options to respond to the unregulated drug supply that is unpredictable and highly toxic.

Areas of focus included:

- Expanding treatment options, specifically through allowing nurses and pharmacists to initiate treatment for OUD, and facilitating an increase in the number of GPs to effectively treat patients with OUD
- Working through barriers to support clinicians in connecting patients with severe addictions to a clean and regulated supply of pharmaceutical opioids
- Addressing the supply chain of diacetylmorphine in the province

Pilot projects exploring safer supply options are underway. In January 2019, Portland Hotel Society launched a pilot project whereby people at high risk of overdose can access oral hydromorphone tablets at the Molson Overdose Prevention Services (OPS) and the Alexander Street Community supportive housing project. Targeting people with severe OUD who had not benefitted from Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT), including injectable OAT, this program provides up to 50 registered participants with oral hydromorphone tablets for crushing and injection under supervision.

In Budget 2019, the Government of Canada committed \$30.5 million over 5 years for targeted measures to address gaps in harm reduction and treatment. Specifically, funding will support efforts to expand access to a safe supply of prescription opioids, protecting people with problematic opioid use from the risks of overdose and death.ⁱⁱ

DISCUSSION:

Access to medication assisted treatment is needed to mitigate the risks associated with the unregulated unpredictable and highly toxic drug supply. A number of groups have called for a safer opioid supply, including the BC Overdose Action Exchangeⁱⁱⁱ, the Vancouver

Police Department^{iv}, the BC Centre on Substance Use^v, and the Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs.^{vi}

The Working Group conducted an evidence review^{vii} and the following findings informed the development of their recommendations:

1. The existing system of addiction care is not working for everyone. OAT is effective in preventing death, but retention in OAT is poor.^{viii}
2. Not everyone who is dying is addicted to opioids. Recent data from Vancouver Coastal Health showed that about 60% of decedents were not regular opioid users.^{ix}
3. Despite dedicated efforts to address the crisis, there has been no sustained change in the number of overdose deaths.

There are a number of systemic barriers inhibiting the expansion of a safer drug supply. These include a relative lack of evidence on public health-oriented pharmaceutical supply interventions, federal and provincial regulatory barriers, lack of access to real-time information such as PharmaNet, lack of adequate funding for project implementation and modelling, and stigma and public misconception regarding addiction and substance use.

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Program ADM/Division: Taryn Walsh, Strategic Priorities & Initiatives

Telephone: 778-698-3096

Program Contact (for content): Justine Patterson, Executive Director, Overdose Emergency Response Centre

Drafter: Kimberly Hilchie, Master of Public Health Intern, Overdose Emergency Response Centre

Date: May 15, 2019

File Name with Path:

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MEETING MATERIAL

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PREPARED FOR: Hon. Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions in preparation for a meeting with Dr. Evan Wood and Cheyenne Johnson from the BC Centre on Substance Use scheduled for 10:00-11:00 AM on May 17, 2019, at the Minister's Constituency Office in New Westminster

TITLE: Minister of Mental Health and Addictions meeting with the BC Centre on Substance Use

MEETING REQUEST/ISSUE: The BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) requested the meeting to discuss the recent recommendations from the Working Group of Colleges and BCCSU. In particular, the BCCSU wants to know if they can clarify any of the issues raised in the report and discuss how they can help support possible next steps.

SHOULD MINISTRY STAFF ATTEND THIS MEETING: Justine Patterson, Executive Director of the Overdose Emergency Response Centre will attend.

BACKGROUND:

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Items Underway

- Address long-standing issues with methadone OAT experienced by both patients and prescribers, including a plan to ensure sustainable access to different methadone formulations to best support patient engagement and retention in OAT.
- Ensure point-of-care access to PharmaNet medication information for all regulatory colleges, prescribers and dispensers of any controlled substances and make this service accessible at no cost at the point-of-care.
- Support Indigenous people to identify and, where possible, collaborate to address considerations for implementation of recommendations among Indigenous Peoples.
- Support continued development of evidence-based guidelines and standards of practice for making controlled substances available where and when needed in the context of BC's public health emergency.

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JOINT MINISTER MEETING: N
IF SO, CAN THIS MATERIAL BE SHARED: N/A

Program ED/Branch/Division: Justine Patterson, Executive Director, Overdose Emergency Response Centre
Date: May 16, 2019