



Councillor
Gord Perks
WARD 4 · PARKDALE–HIGH PARK

HL16.2.1

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May 1, 2020

To: Members of the Board of Health

From: Councillor Gord Perks
Chair, Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel

Re: Urgent need for safer supply due to COVID-19 pandemic

At its meeting in March 2020, the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel discussed the intersecting crises of the opioid poisoning crisis and COVID-19. People who use drugs continue to face a high risk of overdose and death because of the increasingly toxic illicit drug supply. This issue is further exacerbated by the reduction of harm reduction service capacity due to COVID-19. In addition, as people need to interact with the illicit drug market on a regular basis, it is difficult for them to follow public health directions for physical distancing and staying home. It is even more difficult for people who are in shelters or other congregate living situations, especially if they need to self-isolate, because of the negative health consequences of drug withdrawal.

Managed opioid/safer supply initiatives are urgently needed so that people who use drugs can access prescription medications as well as health care and harm reduction supports that are included as part of these programs. There are small scale safer supply programs in Toronto, but these need to be scaled up significantly to address the demand for these health services.

There are opioid substitution treatment programs available, such as methadone and buprenorphine, and these work for many people. However, we need to expand these options to include injectable and tablet hydromorphone programs to help meet the needs of people for whom those options are not effective. This is especially true for people who have a high tolerance for high dose opioids such as fentanyl. We also need the Ministry of Health to add the medication required for injectable hydromorphone (i.e. 50 milligrams/milliliters and 100 milligrams/milliliters hydromorphone) to the Ontario Drug Formulary for prescribers to access.

The Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel therefore asks the Board of Health to endorse the following motion:

That the Board of Health urge the provincial Minister of Health to support implementation of managed opioid/safer supply programs, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, including by adding the required formulation of hydromorphone (i.e. 50 milligrams/milliliters and 100 milligrams/milliliters hydromorphone) to the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary to enable injectable hydromorphone programs to operate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gord Perks". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "s".

Councillor Gord Perks
Ward 4 Parkdale – High Park
Chair, Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel