

June 14, 2021



**PARKDALE  
QUEEN WEST**  
Community  
Health Centre

[www.pqwchc.org](http://www.pqwchc.org)

Board of Health

**Meeting No. 29 - Agenda Item HL 29.2**

To the Members of the Board of Health:

We are still grieving.

We are still grieving our friends, colleagues, family members, and loved ones. Each one of us is overwhelmed by the unrelenting scale of overdose deaths in our communities. 6,000 people died in Canada in 2020. Last year in Ontario, overdose deaths increased by 60% when nearly 2,500 people died. Overdose deaths among people experiencing homelessness rose by 133% during the pandemic, with a significant increase in overdose deaths occurring in shelters, respites and physical distancing hotels. As this committee meets to talk about the overdose action plan and make recommendations without substantive actions, more and more people are dying.

Parkdale Queen West CHC and the harm reduction community has come to this committee countless times to depute as the overdose crisis continues to escalate - we have shared evidence, told personal stories about those we knew, and pleaded with this committee to urgently address this health emergency. Instead, this committee has made recommendation after recommendation without concrete action. Enough of the recommendations and endless working groups: it's time for the City of Toronto to act.

Instead of coming to this meeting to depute any further, we are using this time to hold space outside Toronto City Hall to grieve and honour the ones we've lost as a result of policy inaction and the racist, colonial and oppressive laws which have directly led to this toxic drug supply.

We are calling on the City to not wait for other levels of government to step in and provide solutions when, in fact, there are many lifesaving interventions that can be enacted without them.

We call on the City of Toronto to immediately:

1. Enact drug decriminalization by urgently requesting a Section 56 exemption from the federal government for the City of Toronto. Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Eileen de Villa, recommended decriminalization 3 years ago, with no action from the City since then. There is no time for another working group while people continue to die.
2. Ensure that people who use drugs are the primary stakeholder and expert group on all matters related to decriminalization in the City of Toronto;

3. Immediately implement full-scale harm reduction supports and open overdose prevention sites in all shelters, respites, and physical distancing hotels;
4. Ensure mandatory and comprehensive overdose response training is provided to all staff (including security, employment agency and relief staff) in shelters, respites, and physical distancing hotels;
5. Implement regular and rigorous accountability measures across all City-funded shelters, respites, and physical distancing sites to ensure overdose preparedness;
6. Declare a moratorium on violent encampment evictions and support overdose response measures for encampment residents.

We demand that these measures be urgently adopted by this government as continued inaction will inevitably lead to more preventable deaths. We cannot allow this level of death and grief to be normalized.

Sincerely,



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