



November 26, 2021

Dear Members of the Toronto Board of Health:

Family Service Toronto provides a range of services to individuals, groups, and government, including: clinical counselling services, community development, gender based violence support and prevention, peer support, case management for people with developmental disabilities, financial services (PassportONE), community service space, public policy, and research. Family Service Toronto provided service to over 80,000 people in 2020/21 having successfully moved full virtual service provision in April 2020.

Family Service Toronto is pleased to endorse the Toronto Medical Officer of Health's recommendations for a public health response to the drug crisis that recognizes the importance of human rights as well as the social determinants of health in reducing the harms associated with drug use and criminalization. It is clear to us that problematic or destructive drug use is a health issue, not a criminal justice issue. The report before you constitutes an important step in moving our societal view of how to respond to problematic or destructive drug use from a punitive, de-humanizing, and ineffective response, to a humane, supportive, and effective response. This is a hugely complex problem with no easy, one-step solution. The step you are considering today is a leap forward in providing a comprehensive vision of how society can change its perception and response to problematic drug use, a pre-requisite to facilitate individual drug users to make their own leap forward.

Family Service Toronto was privileged to serve on the working group struck by the Medical Officer of Health to assist in preparing the submission to Health Canada. The effort to make the working group process as accessible and broad based as possible was evident throughout the process. The debate at the working group was spirited, reflecting the complexity and urgency of the issue. The result is the best thinking of people who use drugs, the institutions who interact with them, and the services and agencies who strive to support them. Family Service Toronto urges Members of the Board of Health to endorse the submission to Health Canada.

Sincerely,

Chris Brillinger
Executive Director