



**Board of Directors**

Ms. Lisa Manuel  
(Vice-chair)

Mr. Arnab Basu  
Ms. Lucia Costa  
Ms. Marcy Gerstein  
Ms. Stephanie Gloyn  
Mr. Desmond Rowley  
Ms. Adiba Jafar  
Ms. Lubna Khalid  
Mr. Jaipreet Kohli  
Ms. Kathryn Mettler  
Ms. Marina Morrow  
Ms. Hricha Rakshit  
Mr. Adam Wheeler

**Executive Director**

Ms. Susan Davis

November 25, 2021

Re: Support for Toronto's Submission to Health Canada for an Exemption to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (WGTS)

Dear Health Canada,

Established in Toronto in 1989, Gerstein Crisis Centre provides a range of 24-hour crisis response and intervention services to people across the City of Toronto who are living with mental health and addiction issues. As an accessible source of support and recovery for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, we work collaboratively to improve timely and equitable access to services that are guided by the voices of those with lived experience, to promote wellness, recovery, and strong consumer survivor networks. Gerstein Centre's spectrum of crisis services include 24/7 telephone support, an in-person mobile crisis team, community support referrals, substance use crisis management, follow-up, Mental Health and Justice supports and access to short term crisis beds.

We see in our work everyday vulnerable and marginalized people who use drugs are often the most likely to suffer the consequences associated with drug use stigma and to have interactions with police that result in charges. This stigma and involvement with the criminal justice system often impedes their ability to reduce the harms associated with drug use or to seek social supports, stable housing or health services including treatment. An exemption from the CDSA would begin to reduce this stigma and the barriers to safer use and care that could save lives.

Our communities are facing complex issues and solutions will require innovative models that work collaboratively and cross over jurisdictional lines and government ministries. Support from all three levels of government – municipal, provincial, and federal – is needed to begin to address the inequities that people living with mental health and addiction issues face and to improve the overall wellbeing and health of our communities. Significant resources and policy change are required to reduce harms and improve health, and this includes decriminalization of substance use.

We whole heartedly support Toronto's Submission to Health Canada for an Exemption to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (WGTS) which includes the expansion of pathways and supports available to those most at risk from an increasingly toxic drug supply. Too many lives have been lost, the time for action is now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan Davis".

Susan Davis  
Executive Director  
Gerstein Crisis Centre