

## Submission to the Board of Health

### HL32.3: Actions to Respond to the Drug Poisoning Crisis in Toronto

December 6, 2021

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) welcomes Toronto Public Health's report calling for new and expanded measures to address the opioid poisoning crisis.

Criminalization of substance use has been ineffective and counterproductive. It has caused social harms, with racialized communities disproportionately affected. As the ongoing opioid crisis shows, it causes severe health harms as well.

Toronto Public Health's report to the Board of Health calls for

- increased federal and provincial investments in critical health and social supports including, prevention, harm reduction and treatment services,
- a national framework to decriminalize the simple possession of all drugs for personal use, and
- an approach towards decriminalization within the city's boundaries, while keeping illegal and maintaining legal penalties associated with drug trafficking, such as production and sale.

CAMH supports these principles.

[As we recently stated](#), it is past time for Canada to implement a system in which people do not face criminal penalties for using psychoactive substances. We reiterate our call for the federal government to implement decriminalization of all drugs, nationwide; work with provinces to ramp up treatment and harm reduction services; replace the unregulated, toxic drug supply with evidence-based alternatives; and invest in the social determinants of health.

We commend Toronto Public Health for undertaking this process, and we look forward to working with governments at all levels, partners like Toronto Public Health, and people who use drugs to design a system that truly addresses problematic substance use as a health issue and not a criminal one.

**Leslie Buckley, MD, MPH, FRCPC**

Chief, Addictions Division, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

[Leslie\\_Buckley@camh.ca](mailto:Leslie_Buckley@camh.ca)

**camh** The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is Canada's largest mental health and addiction teaching hospital and one of the world's leading research centres in this field. CAMH is committed to playing a leading role in transforming society's understanding of mental illness and substance use and building a better health care system. To help achieve these goals, CAMH communicates evidence-informed policy advice to stakeholders and policymakers.