

ministresc, hcminister (HC/SC)

From: ministresc, hcminister (HC/SC)
Sent: 2021-01-25 2:09 PM
To: 'kennedy.stewart@vancouver.ca'; 'patricia.daly@vch.ca'
Cc: 'MH.Minister@gov.bc.ca'; 'sheila.malcolmson@gov.bc.ca'
Subject: In response to your correspondence / 20-010754-401

Dear Mr. Mayor and Dr. Daly:

Thank you for your correspondence of December 7, 2020, in which you submitted a request for an exemption under subsection 56(1) of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* to decriminalize the personal possession of small amounts of controlled substances within the municipal borders of the City of Vancouver. I regret the delay in responding.

Too many lives have been lost to the opioid overdose crisis. In fact, between July and November 2020 alone, 184 people in Vancouver lost their lives to opioid overdoses. This is a sobering reminder, which highlights a continued need for our collective work to protect the lives of people who use substances.

As you are aware, the federal government directly supports initiatives that broaden assistance and treatment options for people who use substances, which include providing access to on-the-ground supports. To hasten and further support community action on problematic substance use, we dedicated \$66 million to the Department's Substance Use and Addictions Program through our Fall Economic Statement 2020.

Health Canada officials will work with officials from the City of Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health to better understand the framework you are proposing.

I am committed to our continued work to identify options that respond to the local needs of the City of Vancouver. As we work through the details of your exemption request, I will also help you explore policy measures you identify that will address and alleviate the death and suffering caused by the opioid crisis, a tragedy exacerbated by the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We must work together to save lives. To this end, my staff and I are always available to discuss these matters with you.

Our partnership on this initiative will also help address racial disparities and discrimination, particularly regarding the overrepresentation of racialized people in the criminal justice system. For instance, recent statistics show that the rate of Indigenous adults admitted to federal custody was six times higher than the rate of non-Indigenous adults, while the rate for Black inmates was two times higher than for non-Black inmates.

We must explore policy measures that reduce harm to racialized communities, and explore alternatives to criminal penalties that can begin to address the systemic inequities these communities face.

Thank you for your partnership and your ongoing leadership, and please accept my best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
Health Canada

c.c. The Honourable Sheila Malcolmson, M.L.A.
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Government of British Columbia