



## RESOLUTION 2021-07

### The need to establish an Ontario Drug Task Force and a Coordinator position to liaise with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

#### PREAMBLE

The rising rate of opioid-related deaths across Canada has been an ongoing and significant national public health crisis for more than a decade.<sup>1</sup> In just the first three months of 2020, there were 1,018 opioid-related deaths recorded in Canada, the vast majority of which (96%) were accidental.<sup>2</sup>

In June 2020, Ontario's Chief Coroner announced a 25% increase in suspected drug-related deaths between March and May 2020 compared to the monthly median reported in 2019.<sup>3</sup> Similar trends have been reported elsewhere in Canada.<sup>4</sup> It is expected that this increase in drug-related deaths is being driven by a combination of factors, including: an increasingly toxic and unregulated ('street') drug supply, barriers to access to harm reduction services and treatment, and physical distancing requirements leading to more people using drugs alone<sup>5</sup>.

**WHEREAS** the opioid overdose crisis/emergency is increasing across communities in Ontario. Accidental overdoses and deaths are on the rise creating major challenges for the affected individuals, families, community agencies and police services, and

**WHEREAS** police services are expending significant resources on sudden death investigations, including working on cases to determine the trafficker bring them before the courts, and

**WHEREAS** police services are dealing with public disorder that can arise from the systems that contribute to persons using drugs problematically. Public disorder that arises from these systemic issues can be in the form of disturbances, aggressive

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<sup>1</sup> Gomes T., and Juurlink, D.N. Understanding the implications of a shifting opioid landscape in Ontario. *Healthc Q.* 2019;22(3):6-11. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.12927/hcq.2019.26025>

<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada. Opioid-related harms in Canada [Internet]. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada; 2020 [cited 2020 Oct 15]. Available from: <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids/>

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. CCENDU alert: changes related to COVID-19 in the illegal drug supply and access to services and resulting health harms. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction; 2020. Available from: <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-05/CCSA-COVID-19-CCENDU-Illegal-Drug-Supply-Alert-2020-en.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. CCENDU alert: changes related to COVID-19 in the illegal drug supply and access to services and resulting health harms. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction; 2020. Available from: <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-05/CCSA-COVID-19-CCENDU-Illegal-Drug-Supply-Alert-2020-en.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> CBC News. More people died of an illicit drug overdose in first 8 months of 2020 than all of 2019: B.C. coroner. CBC [Internet], 2020 Sep 23 [cited 2020 Oct 15]; British Columbia. Available from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/overdose-deaths-bc-august-2020-1.5735247>

panhandling, urination and defecation in public and private areas, discarded needles, loitering, trespassing and others, and

**WHEREAS** drug-facilitated crime requires police resources in the form of first response and investigations. These crimes include all property crimes and crimes of violence, including robbery, home invasions, assaults, weapons offences, extortion, and threatening among many others, and

**WHEREAS** human trafficking victims in large part are suffering from addictions. There has been a large investment in police resources to work on these investigations by putting the traffickers before the courts and then supporting the victims through appropriate referrals and on-going communication, and

**WHEREAS** to reduce the harm associated with substance use disorder will take all pillars working together across the province (harm reduction, treatment, prevention/education, and enforcement) on a provincial strategy, and

**WHEREAS** the Government of Ontario must develop a comprehensive drug strategy taking a public health approach. While there are several community drug strategies working diligently in each of their respective communities, a provincial opioid strategy task force with a liaison to the provincial government is essential to take the lead; and

**WHEREAS** substance use disorder is a public health issue and requires a coordinated and collaborative approach. The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care would be responsible to establish a framework and invest in robust evidence-based treatment programs and other support services to assist addressing systemic barriers that exist for people who use drugs; and

**WHEREAS** the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP), in its discussion paper on harm reduction, has called on the federal and provincial governments to invest the necessary resources on harm reduction initiatives, specifically: supervised consumption and treatment sites, safe supply of drugs, and the necessary diversion programs to accompany any legislative changes. These resources are needed to allow people who use drugs humanity and dignity, which currently is impossible with systems that allow people who use drugs to fall through systemic cracks.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police calls on the Government of Ontario to engage with its partners, including police, to establish an Ontario Drug Task Force to collectively develop a policy to deal with opioids other drugs and the related issues associated to problematic use already noted.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the OACP supports the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's (AMO) report *Addressing the Opioid Overdose Emergency in Ontario* and calls on the Government of Ontario to appoint a dedicated coordinator to focus on a provincial response that includes building community partnerships and acting as a conduit between government and community agencies. The need for a provincial response is further emphasized in the December 20, 2018 verdict of the Coroner's inquest (jury recommendations) related to the death of Bradley John Chapman.