

## **CORRESPONDENCE – September 2022**

- a) **Date:** July 15, 2022  
**Topic:** Letter Addressing Substance Use Harms Decriminalization  
**From:** Timiskaming Health Unit  
**To:** The Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health

### ***Background:***

At its June 8, 2022 regular meeting, the Timiskaming Board of Health passed a motion to support the call on the federal government to decriminalize the possession of all illicit drugs for personal use and support the immediate scale up of prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services.

### ***Recommendation: Receive.***

- b) **Date:** July 15, 2022  
**Topic:** THU Letter of Support – Response to the Opioid Crisis in Ontario-Wide  
**From:** Timiskaming Health Unit  
**To:** The Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health and Deputy Premier

### ***Background:***

At its June 8, 2022 regular meeting, the Timiskaming Board of Health passed a motion to support the correspondence from Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) in response to the province-wide Opioid Crisis. The correspondence from SMDHU was endorsed by the Middlesex-London Board of Health in April, 2022.

### ***Recommendation: Receive.***

- c) **Date:** August 11, 2022  
**Topic:** SMDHU Letter – Indirect Impacts Surveillance Dashboard  
**From:** Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit  
**To:** Boards of Health in Ontario

### ***Background:***

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) has developed the Indirect Impacts Surveillance Dashboard which provides relevant local data on priority indicators for the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on various domains of population health and health equity. The dashboard is intended for SMDHU, community partners, and municipalities to consider in priority setting and planning.

### ***Recommendation: Receive.***



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July 15, 2022

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos  
Minister of Health  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Duclos:

**Re: Decriminalization of Personal Possession of Illicit Drugs**

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On June 8, 2022, at a regular meeting of the Board for the Timiskaming Health Unit, the Board considered a staff report related to addressing substance use related harms.

Motion (#25R-2022) was passed which included the following:

**That the Timiskaming Board of Health support the call on the federal government to decriminalize the possession of all illicit drugs for personal use as an evidence-informed approach that acknowledges that substance use is a health issue and not one of morality, will power or criminal justice and, further that the federal government support the immediate scale up of prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services...**

The Timiskaming Health Unit fully supports the above recommendation, and thanks you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carman Kidd, Board of Health Chair

C: Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Associate Minister of Health  
Hon. Anthony Rota, Member of Parliament Nipissing-Timiskaming  
Hon. Charlie Angus, Member of Parliament Timmins-James Bay  
Jeff McGuire, Executive Director, Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police  
Aviva Rotenberg, Executive Director, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police  
Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies

March 16, 2022

The Honourable Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Elliott:

**Re: Response to the Opioid Crisis in Simcoe Muskoka and Ontario-wide**

On March 16, 2022, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) Board of Health endorsed a set of provincial recommendations to help address the ongoing and escalating opioid crisis experienced within Simcoe Muskoka and province-wide. Despite regional activities in response to the opioid crisis, there remains an urgent need for heightened provincial attention and action to promptly and adequately address the extensive burden of opioid-related deaths being experienced by those who use substances.

In the 19 months of available data since the start of the pandemic (March 2020 to September 2021) there have been 245 opioid-related deaths in Simcoe Muskoka. This is nearly 70% higher than the 145 opioid-related deaths in the 19 months prior to the start of the pandemic (August 2018 to February 2020), when our communities were already struggling in the face of this crisis. The first nine months of 2021 saw an opioid-related death rate more than 33% higher than the first nine months of 2020, suggesting the situation has not yet stabilized.

As such, the SMDHU Board of Health urges your government to take the following actions:

1. Create a multisectoral task force to guide the development of a robust provincial opioid response plan that will ensure necessary resourcing, policy change, and health and social system coordination.
2. Expand access to evidence informed harm reduction programs and practices including lifting the provincial cap of 21 Consumption and Treatment Service (CTS) Sites, funding Urgent Public Health Needs Sites (UPHNS) and scaling up safer opioid supply options.
3. Explore revisions to the current CTS model to address the growing trends of opioid poisoning amongst those who are using inhalation methods.
4. Expand access to opioid agonist therapy for opioid use disorder through a range of settings (e.g. mobile outreach, primary care, emergency departments), and a variety of medication options.
5. Provide a long-term financial commitment to create more affordable and supportive housing for people in need, including people with substance use disorders.
6. Address the structural stigma and harms that discriminate against people who use drugs, through provincial support and advocacy to the Federal government to decriminalize personal use and possession of substances and ensure increased investments in health and social services at all levels.

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7. Increase investments in evidence-informed substance use prevention and mental health promotion initiatives, that provide foundational support for the health, safety and well-being of individuals, families, and neighbourhoods, beginning from early childhood.
8. Fund a fulltime position of a Drug Strategy Coordinator/Lead for the Simcoe Muskoka Opioid Strategy.

The SMDHU Board of Health has endorsed these recommendations based on the well-demonstrated need for a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach that addresses the social determinants of health and recognizes the value of harm reduction strategies alongside substance use disorder treatment strategies, as part of the larger opioid crisis response. Evidence has shown that harm reduction strategies can prevent overdoses, save lives, and connect people with treatment and social services. Further, there is an urgent need to change the current Canadian drug policy to allow a public health response to substance use, through decriminalization of personal use and possession paired with avenues towards health and social services, as our Board called for in 2018. These recommendations collectively promote effective public health and safety measures to address the social and health harms associated with substance use.

Sincerely,

**ORIGINAL Signed By:**

Anita Dubeau  
Board of Health Chair  
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

cc: Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
Attorney General of Ontario  
Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
Ontario Health  
Ontario Boards of Health  
Members of Parliament in Simcoe Muskoka  
Members of Provincial Parliament in Simcoe Muskoka  
Mayors and Municipal Councils in Simcoe Muskoka

August 11, 2022

To Community Partners and Stakeholders:

**Re: Indirect Impacts Surveillance Dashboard**

Early in the pandemic, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) conducted a situational assessment to understand the indirect population health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A report entitled '[Mitigating Harms of COVID-19 Public Health Measures](#)' was released in September 2020, and outlined key findings, mitigation strategies and recommendations. It also included an epidemiological data summary, local environmental scan, as well as literature reviews conducted by SMDHU, Public Health Ontario, Timiskaming Health Unit and Southwestern Public Health.

Based on the report's recommendation to continue surveillance of the pandemic's impact on various domains of population health and health equity, SMDHU identified priority indicators and developed a tool to communicate the data. The result is the development of the [Indirect Impacts Surveillance Dashboard](#). The dashboard provides relevant data for SMDHU, community partners and municipalities to consider in priority setting and planning through future pandemic waves, recovery and beyond.

The dashboard presents analyzed data and describes the change from pre-pandemic values across eight indicator categories. These eight categories include basic needs, child and family health, substance use, mental health, immunizations, oral health, infectious disease, and general health. The dashboard uses local data where possible, and displays indicators for Simcoe Muskoka, Simcoe County, Muskoka District and Ontario. SMDHU will continue to monitor the indicators and update the dashboard twice per year. COVID-19 data can also be accessed via [SMDHU's HealthSTATS](#) pages.

I hope the dashboard and situational assessment will be of value to your organization. If you have questions please direct them to Brenda Guarda, Manager Population Health Assessment, Surveillance and Evaluation at [brenda.guarda@smdhu.org](mailto:brenda.guarda@smdhu.org).

Sincerely,

**ORIGINAL Signed By:**

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

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