



August 25, 2020

Honourable Jason Luan
Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
420 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Luan:

AUMA has noted with concern that the COVID-19 pandemic is coinciding with an increase in opioid overdoses. We appreciate the province's \$4 million investment to expand access to the province's virtual opioid dependency program, as well as the commitment in Budget 2020 to fund 4,000 addiction treatment spaces over the next four years. However, we are concerned with the defunding of intensive opioid agonist therapy clinics in Edmonton and Calgary; the ongoing uncertainty around supervised consumption sites; and the cancellation of the virtual opioid overdose response program.

It is important to remember that death is just one possible outcome of an overdose: for each person who dies, many more suffer significant medical complications, which puts an additional strain on healthcare resources. AUMA supports the development of a comprehensive, evidence-based provincial drug strategy built on the four pillars of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement. We believe harm reduction initiatives are not only a key element of such a strategy, but that they also represent good value for taxpayers:

- Since 2016, Alberta has seen an overall decline in opioid-related deaths, overdoses in emergency rooms, and EMS responses attributable to harm reduction initiatives. An estimated \$5 dollars is saved for every \$1 spent on harm reduction.
- A recent University of Calgary study found that the supervised consumption site in Calgary has saved the province more than \$2.3 million since its inception and will likely save millions more if it is maintained.

The robust body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of harm reduction has led the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to release a report endorsing both the four-pillar approach to substance use and harm reduction initiatives such as safe consumption sites and decriminalization of simple possession of illicit drugs.

AUMA would be pleased to work with the province to discuss how municipalities can support a comprehensive, collaborative, compassionate, and evidence-based approach to provincial drug policy. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please feel free to contact me by email at president@auma.ca or on my cell phone at (403) 363-9224.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Morishita', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Barry Morishita
AUMA President

Cc: Dr. Verna Yiu, President & CEO, Alberta Health Services