



November 1, 2023

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Via email chiefcoronerresponse@gov.bc.ca

Lisa Lapointe
Chief Coroner
BC Coroners Service
PO Box 9259 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9J4

Dear Ms. Lapointe:

Thank you for your report, *BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: An Urgent Response to a Continuing Crisis*. I am grateful for the panel members' passion for saving lives and connecting people to care in the midst of the ongoing and unrelenting toxic drug crisis, and for their time, work, and contributions to this process.

Our government is expanding access to mental health and addiction care for people in all regions of the province. We are working every day to add new services for people across the full spectrum of care, including early intervention and prevention; treatment and recovery; aftercare services; and harm reduction services, like overdose prevention sites to keep people alive while we connect them to care.

We are also working to separate people from toxic illicit street drugs through a prescriber model for the delivery of pharmaceutical alternatives. As you may know, Dr. Bonnie Henry is finalizing her review of this program and I look forward to implementing recommendations that will make this program more accessible and safer for people and for prescribers.

Non-prescription models for the delivery of pharmaceutical alternatives are not under consideration. Accordingly, I cannot accept the primary recommendation of this report to pursue a non-prescriber model of safer supply.

Input from past Death Review Panels has been constructive in guiding the development of many supports that are helping to keep people alive and connected to treatment today. Previous panels have provided important data-driven insights into the toxic drug crisis. In particular, the last report, issued March 9, 2022, documented the disproportionate impacts of the toxic drug crisis on Indigenous Peoples and people who work in the trades and transportation sectors. Your most recent monthly statistical reports highlighted the growing impact that the toxic drug crisis is having on youth, which is a significant concern of our government.

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I welcome the extensive expertise of the panel members to focus on these concerning data and trends. The collective decades of experience and knowledge of these respected panel members can help address the stubborn and systemic challenges we are facing. We are relying on them to help inform our approach on child and youth mental health and substance use. We require their insights as we work with First Nations, Indigenous, and Métis communities to address the complex and multi-generational needs of Indigenous Peoples. We also need to work together with experts, unions, and employers to better understand the ways we can improve care for those working in the trades, construction, transportation, and heavy equipment sectors. We will continue to seek their advice on these and other urgent issues – and our work to build a comprehensive and integrated system of mental health and substance use care that includes provision of pharmaceutical alternatives through a prescriber model.

As the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, I value the constructive and practical advice from health and addictions experts and people with lived experience to end the toxic drug crisis. We recognize that there are challenges and barriers with the current prescriber-based model, and we believe if we come together, we can address these issues collaboratively and connect more people to the care that they need. I know there is much more to be done to save lives and our government will continue to take action to help more people access treatment and harm reduction services, when and where they need it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Whiteside". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jennifer Whiteside
Minister