



December 7, 2022

Honourable Jennifer Whiteside  
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Whiteside:

Thank you for agreeing to serve as Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. I trust in your leadership at this critical time to deliver results for the people of British Columbia.

British Columbians continue to recover from and respond to the upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate related natural disasters, while global inflation is driving up costs for more households and the world's economic outlook is concerning. Now more than ever, we need to focus on building a secure, low emission, sustainable economy, and a province where everyone can find a good home – whether you live in a rural area, in a city, or in an Indigenous community. We will continue working toward true and meaningful reconciliation by supporting opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to be full partners in the inclusive and sustainable province we are building together.

Our government is committed to delivering on the mandate British Columbians gave us in 2020. Together we can make life better for people in B.C., improve the services we all rely on, and ensure a sustainable province for future generations.

As we renew our work, my priority as Premier is to deliver results that people can see and feel in four key areas:

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- **Attainable and affordable housing:** In the wake of soaring prices and record migration to B.C., we will take on the important work of building new homes that are actually attainable for the middle class, while continuing our work to address the housing crisis for those in distress on our streets.
- **Safer communities:** To address concerns about public safety, both for the people struggling with mental health and addiction on our streets, as well as the feeling that downtown centres are not as safe as they were before the pandemic, we will work with our partners at all levels of government, the justice and health care systems, the non-profit sector, and community leaders to find solutions for this complex challenge facing our province, and work overtime to seize the assets of high-level criminals.
- **Improved health care:** Amid unprecedented pressures we will continue to work to strengthen our public health care system, from family doctors to new hospitals, so care is there for each of us when we need it.
- **A sustainable, clean, secure, and fair economy:** We will continue our work investing in British Columbians, fighting racism and promoting equity, and building a clean economy that addresses our obligations to combat climate change by driving down emissions, while creating good, family supporting jobs.

There are very few British Columbians who have not had their lives directly impacted by someone struggling with a mental health or addictions challenge, or both. Responding to addiction and mental health requires a public health approach based in evidence, while protecting and promoting community safety for those struggling with these health challenges, and the broader community as a whole. The unifying theme of how we respond to people struggling with mental health and addiction issues must be that we respond with love and respect for the humanity of the person. This means treating people with dignity and respect, offering clear and available opportunities for meaningful health interventions at every turn.

Government must do all we can to keep people alive so that we can offer them the hope of treatment and recovery from addiction. Separating those addicted to drugs from predatory drug dealers and toxic drugs is a necessary step to preserve life, but it is not the whole solution. Coupled with these initiatives, we must have seamless detox, treatment, and supportive housing to help people escape addiction and rebuild their lives. We must ensure that mental health response is built into our public health care system.

We can find a way forward for British Columbia, using the resources we have at hand to address these twin challenges. Recommendations from the all-party committee, recommendations from people with lived experience, and recommendations from public health experts based in peer-reviewed evidence about what works must guide us as we continually look for ways to support those struggling in our communities.

Since 2020, our government has made considerable progress on important initiatives including:

- Building a comprehensive system of mental health and addictions care, including by implementing A Pathway to Hope, B.C.'s roadmap for making mental health and addictions care better for people.
- Accelerating B.C.'s response to the illicit drug toxicity crisis, including by separating more people from the toxic drug supply through safe prescription alternatives and opening new treatment beds. Through efforts with the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, British Columbia will be the first province to decriminalize simple possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use.
- Developing and launching complex care housing to provide an increased level of support – including more access to nurses and psychiatrists – for those with overlapping mental health, substance use, trauma, and acquired brain injuries.

As you continue to make progress on items in the previous mandate letter, over the remaining period of this mandate I expect you to prioritize making progress on the following:

- Taking into account the unanimous recommendations of the Select Standing Committee on Health, and with support from the Minister of Health, continue to lead and accelerate B.C.'s response to the illicit drug toxicity crisis across the full continuum of care – prevention, harm reduction, safe supply, treatment, and recovery.
- Expand new complex care, treatment, recovery, detox, and after-care facilities across the province, while building a new model of treatment offering seamless care through detox, treatment, and supportive housing so people don't fall through the cracks and can get quality care when and where they need it.
- Strengthen governance, guidelines, and best practices for incorporating evidence-based care in the prevention, treatment, and recovery system.
- Expand B.C.'s prescribed safe supply programs to separate more people from the toxic drug supply through safe alternatives. Work with regulatory colleges, professional associations, and other levels of government to overcome barriers.
- Implement decriminalization of simple possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use, while maintaining focus on establishing rules and guidelines that protect public health and community safety.

- Assess and expand supports for people who are causing detrimental harm to themselves and others as a result of mental health or substance use, to increase safety and improve health outcomes while upholding the rights of all British Columbians.
- Work with the First Nations Health Authority to deliver culturally appropriate mental health and substance use services for Indigenous Peoples.
- With support from the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, work to improve public safety in our communities, including by implementing initiatives to address repeat and violent offending.
- With support from the Minister of Children and Family Development and the Minister of Education and Child Care, lead work to continue our government's commitment to addressing mental health problems early by expanding Integrated Child and Youth Teams to 20 school districts.
- Support the work of the Minister of Housing to better coordinate services to deliver improved outcomes for people living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, in collaboration with the Ministers of Health, Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and Public Safety and Solicitor General, as well as Indigenous Peoples, external partners, and others.

Our work together must continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of people in this province. Issues not contemplated by this letter will come forward for government action and I ask you to bring such matters forward for consideration by the Planning and Priorities Committee of Cabinet, with the expectation that any proposed initiatives will be subject to the usual Cabinet and Treasury Board oversight and include measurable outcomes for British Columbians. Your ministry's priorities must reflect our government's overall strategic plan as determined by Cabinet.

British Columbians expect their elected representatives to work together to advance the public good. That means seeking out, fostering, and championing good ideas regardless of their origin. I expect you to reach out to elected members from all parties as you deliver on your mandate. Further, you will build thoughtful and sustained relationships both with title holders and through public and stakeholder engagement plans that incorporate diverse perspectives early in the policy development process. Federal partnerships and resources will be particularly important and, on behalf of our government, you will engage with the federal government on advancing priorities to improve the lives of British Columbians.

As a Cabinet, we will uphold the highest standards of ethics, collaboration, and good conduct in service of the public, and as a Minister of the Crown, you are expected to

review, understand, and act according to the *Members' Conflict of Interest Act*. You will establish a collaborative working relationship with your Deputy Minister, and the public servants under their direction, who provide the professional, non-partisan advice that is fundamental to delivering on our government's priorities. Your Minister's Office must meet the highest standards for integrity and provide a respectful, rewarding environment for all staff.

The rural and urban challenges that we face are urgent and complex. In response, we must be forward-thinking, strategic, and ready to work across disciplines and old divisions in new ways. Labour shortages are a major issue globally, and British Columbia is no exception, including in the public service. Maintaining the BC Public Service as an employer of excellence will be key to retaining and recruiting the diverse professionals we rely on to deliver essential services, advice, and analysis.

At the core of this work is listening and responding to the priorities of people in B.C. Together, we can deliver results in very real ways – ways that people can see, feel, and touch, and that change their lives for the better. Thank you for doing this important work with me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Eby", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Eby, KC  
Premier