

December 10, 2021

Public Statement:

**Response to the Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply (Special Committee)
Announcement by the Alberta Government**

Contrary to recent government and opinion column assertions, while oxycodone may have played a role two decades ago, it is not fueling today's toxic supply problem. Prescribed substances are now involved in a minority of drug poisoning cases. Moreover, the sudden loss of a known drug supply (e.g. rapid deprescribing, forced abstinence, and drug seizures by police) has been demonstrated to cause harm in the form of mental health crises and drug poisoning deaths.

The language used throughout this Special Committee announcement suggests from the outset that it will generate another biased and methodologically flawed review of the available evidence. We are concerned that any committee outputs will be subsequently weaponized against people who use drugs.

Safer supply is emerging as a strategy to curb poisoning death and initiatives in other provinces across the country are supported and funded by Health Canada. Safer supply refers to providing pharmaceutical agents as a safer alternative to the toxic illegal drug supply to people who are at high risk of a poisoning event. Safer supply builds on existing approaches that provide medications to treat substance use disorder. There is strong national and international evidence supporting the use of prescribed opioids as treatment for substance use disorder (oral and injectable buprenorphine, methadone, slow-release oral morphine, and injectable opioid agonist treatment (iOAT)), but these conventional treatments are not effective, feasible or (in the case of iOAT) available locally for many people who use drugs. Given the magnitude of the current drug poisoning crisis, alternative safer supply options should be considered. Early research findings available from Health Canada show that safer supply options can contribute to:

- reduced infections
- decreased crime activity
- lower rates of poisoning deaths
- reduced hospital admissions and emergency department visits
- improved connections to general medical care
- improved connections to housing and social supports
- improved connections to care and treatment for people who have not had support services in the past

In short, this strategy may prevent supply-related harm to the individual using the drugs, reduce the cost to the health care system, and reduce the cost to the community in which they reside. Like other novel approaches, the ability to evaluate outcomes and monitor for benefits and unintended harms will help to optimize the approach over the longer term.

The Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association's Opioid Poisoning Committee (OPC) is ready, enthusiastic, and willing to provide expert witnesses for the Special Committee. Having representation nominated by the OPC would help to ensure that the work produced by the Special Committee is impartial, evidence based and includes medical professionals.