



February 20, 2017

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Mr. Michael Crawford  
President  
BC Association of Social Workers  
402 – 1755 West Broadway  
Vancouver BC V6J 4S5

Dear Colleague:

We write to extend our gratitude to the contributions you and your colleagues are making to our collective response to British Columbia's unprecedented opioid overdose-related public health emergency.

We recognize that this crisis is placing a tremendous demand on those at the front line working to prevent deaths: BC Emergency Health Services staff, fire fighters, regional health authorities, municipal police, RCMP, housing providers, contracted agencies, and other community staff and volunteers, peers, friends, and loved ones.

Moreover, we note the extraordinary efforts being made by public safety officials. These include members of the municipal police, RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency who are working to stop fentanyl and its analogues from crossing the border and harming our friends and loved ones. Members of the BC Coroners Service have also been working tirelessly to address the many opioid related deaths.

Having said that, we recognize the additional stresses that this unparalleled overdose epidemic is putting on front line responders. Unfortunately, we do not see this situation turning around in the near future, and we are actively assessing how and where we can enhance our systems capacity to sustain this level of response.

In the interim, we remind you that BC Emergency Health Services offers a number of psychosocial supports to paramedics, dispatchers and other front line staff to help them cope with the occupational stresses they face. The Critical Incident Stress Management program has a team of 87 peers and 37 trauma counsellors available around the province who can understand and relate to occupational stressors. It is strictly confidential and available around the clock. In 2016, more than 200 employees connected with mental health counsellors through this program, and BC Emergency Health Services is working to expand the program, by including more self-assessment and resilience education tools.

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Employee and Family Assistance Programs are available for all health authority staff, and many community organizations also have access to these programs. Other first responders would as well, and they also have Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams which is a peer-to-peer counseling/support program.

While short-term indicators suggest that we will have some difficult months ahead of us, with shared determination and common purpose together we can reverse this tragic situation.

Please accept our whole-hearted gratitude for the exemplary work that you and your staff, members and volunteers continue to perform. The dedication and compassion you bring to this effort inspire a shared sense of hope and solidarity.

Yours very sincerely,



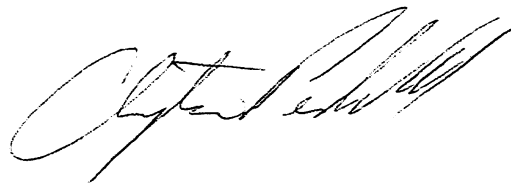
Terry Lake  
Minister of Health



Mike Morris  
Minister of Public Safety  
and Solicitor General



Perry Kendall  
Provincial Health Officer  
Co-chair  
Joint Task Force on Overdose Response



Clayton Pecknold  
Director of Policing Services  
Co-chair  
Joint Task Force on Overdose Response