

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

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SELECT SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE SAFE SUPPLY
c/o Committee Clerk
3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5K 1E7

April 25, 2022

Dear Committee members:

We are writing to express concern regarding the report produced by researchers working at the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health & Addiction that reviews the evidence concerning safe supply interventions. We are people with lived and living experiences of substance use, and many of us work in organizations that represent the population that the report's authors focus on.

We feel that this report is misleading on several fronts and wholeheartedly disagree with the conclusions contained in the report. First and foremost, it is entirely inaccurate to suggest, as the reports' authors have done, that a safe supply is not something desired by people who use drugs. The authors certainly never consulted any of us. Instead, they relied on reports on people in treatment settings outside of Canada, and an online survey conducted in the US regarding decriminalization. They neglect to mention that in Canada, it is people who use drugs (PWUD) who have led the call for novel responses to the drug poisoning crisis that has claimed so many of our friends, partners, and family members. Indeed, the Canadian Association of People who Use Drugs (CAPUD) and many other organizations representing PWUD have taken a very public position in support of the establishment and evaluation of safe supply programs. We are offended by this misrepresentation of our opinions.

Second, the authors repeatedly suggest that recovery-oriented housing is the solution to the overdose crisis. This is a gross over-simplification that does not reflect the lived experience of our community members. Many of us have been exposed to systems of recovery, including residential-based recovery programs, and found them in many instances to be unhelpful and stigmatizing for people engaged in active substance use. Many of us simply have no desire to stop using drugs and have found ways to continue using drugs without enduring the social suffering the report's authors seem to think always goes hand in hand with substance use.

Third, we are offended that the authors dismiss the qualitative accounts of PWUD who have contributed data regarding their experience receiving safe supply services in several of the

studies reviewed. To simply discount these studies and the direct experiences of PWUD is offensive, and we believe that these accounts provide important initial insights into the benefits and shortcomings of current safe supply programs.

Lastly, we understand that evaluations of safe supply are ongoing, and many of us are contributing our expertise to these evaluations, as well as the safe supply policies being developed at the provincial and federal levels. We know that there is still much to be learned about safe supply, and we still need to undertake work to optimize these programs through evaluation, innovation, and adaptation. Therefore, we take issue with the authors concluding at this time that safe supply is a harmful approach to addressing overdose death. This is premature and does not reflect the experiences of PWUD in safe supply programs at this time, as indicated in the qualitative studies included in the report.

As the people most affected by the current contaminated drug supply, we were disappointed to see this offensive and flawed report come from researchers working at a Canadian university, and request that you give no serious consideration to it when deliberating safe supply policy, we suggest that policymakers and researchers such as those who wrote the report on safe supply take the time to meet with people who use drugs and the organizations that represent them to hear firsthand their experiences and perspectives. We are the true experts, who live by the philosophy **“Nothing about us without us”**.

Yours truly,

Natasha Touesnard

Executive Director, Canadian Association of People who Use Drugs