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Supervised Consumption Services & Manitoba

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

80+ organizations send open letter to all levels of government demanding immediate action to respond to overdose crisis

Winnipeg, MB, November 4, 2022: a group of community organizations on the front line of the overdose crisis is asking all levels of government for immediate actions that will provide them with the tools and resources needed to respond to this crisis. In an open letter dated October 31 (included below) they list seven robust actions the government could take immediately to reduce the number of Manitobans dying from drug poisoning.

The actions recommended are rooted in evidence and human rights, and help people who use drugs and save lives. These actions include declaring a public health emergency, supporting mobile overdose prevention services, expanding access to a safe supply, support funding for supervised consumption sites, providing overdose data in a timely manner, funding frontline organizations to expand and develop programming, and cease expending resources on the enforcement of simple possession of illicit drugs.

As stated in the letter, all of these harm reduction interventions are research-based and supported and validated by academics, public health experts and people who use drugs. The group has requested to meet with the government and urged them to act strongly and proactively on these calls.

These organizations have come together as a community to promote and support educating the public on the severity of the crisis.

Background:

Manitoba has been in an overdose crisis due to a toxic drug supply since 2016. In 2021 the province had a record number of 407 deaths which is a rate of 30/100,000 Manitobans dying last year; an increase from 372 in 2020. Data suggests that even more Manitobans will die in 2022 — current numbers for the first half of the year are over 250 deaths. In recent weeks the community has seen an increase in deaths due to a toxic supply of drugs in Winnipeg with the community reporting five overdose deaths in shelters and in the City of Winnipeg. This is not just an issue in Winnipeg, as communities in rural, remote, and Northern Manitoba are reaching

out for support to address overdoses and overdose deaths in their communities; a single community reported 22 overdoses and nine deaths in a three month period.

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For more information, please contact:

Name	Contact Info
Shohan Illsley Executive Director Manitoba Harm Reduction Network	204-250-2380 shohan@mhrn.ca
Jamil Mahmood Executive Director Main Street Project	204-599-5972 jmahmood@mainstreetproject.ca
Levi Foy Executive Director Sunshine House	executivedirector@sunshinehousewpg.org

October 31st, 2022

OPEN LETTER – Urgent Action Required for Direct Action to address the Overdose Deaths and Toxic Drug Supply in Manitoba

To Whom It May Concern,

Manitoba has been in an overdose crisis due to a toxic drug supply since 2016. In 2021 the province had a record number of 407 deaths which is a rate of 30/100,000 Manitobans dying last year; an increase from 372 in 2020. Data suggests that even more Manitobans will die in 2022; current numbers for the first half of the year are over 250 deaths. This week alone, the community has seen an increase in deaths due to a toxic supply of drugs in Winnipeg; with the community reporting five deaths due to overdose in shelters and in the City of Winnipeg. This is not just an issue in Winnipeg, as communities in rural, remote, and Northern Manitoba are reaching out for support to address overdoses and overdose deaths in their communities; a single community reported 22 overdoses and nine deaths in a three month period.

As community organizations on the front line of the overdose crisis we are asking for immediate actions that will provide us with the tools and resources needed to respond to this crisis. We are working tirelessly to ensure not one life is lost. Our spaces have become injection sites, our doorways, washrooms and alleyways are overdose response sites, and yet this is not enough, we need action now.

Manitobans are asking for action in a recent Probe Research poll from October 21, 2022: “Eight in ten Winnipeggers (81%) also support creating a safe consumption site for those who use drugs”

To reduce the number of Manitobans dying from drug poisoning, we need immediate and robust actions that are grounded in human rights and a public health approach. We are calling on all levels of government to:

1. Declare a public health emergency OR Publicly acknowledge the overdose crisis to ensure all Manitobans are aware of the current public health crisis;
2. Provide immediate support for a Mobile Overdose Prevention Site and provide funding to equip the MOPS with drug testing technology (FTIR Machine) to reduce overdoses and drug poisonings;
3. Expand access to a Safe Supply of all drugs in Manitoba, an evidence-based public health measure that will reduce overdoses and drug poisonings;
4. Provide immediate support and funding for Supervised Consumption Sites and Services in Winnipeg as well as rural communities showing readiness. This includes Pop-Up Safe Consumption services that can respond to communities in the moment to reduce overdoses and drug poisonings;
5. Provide overdose data in a timely manner that will allow community-based organizations to respond in the moment to reduce overdoses and drug poisonings;

- a. This includes data sharing and accountability with Police (WPS, RCMP) and Fire Paramedic Services.
6. Provide funding for frontline organizations to expand and develop programming to respond to the crisis to reduce overdoses and drug poisonings;
7. Recommend that police forces immediately and for the duration of this public health emergency cease expending resources on the enforcement of simple possession of illicit drugs and related offences;

All of the harm reduction interventions are supported and validated by academics, public health experts and People Who Use Drugs to save their communities. We urge you to act strongly and proactively on these calls. We respectfully ask for a meeting with all of you as soon as possible to discuss.

As a community we are coming together to promote and support educating the public on the needs in our community and the crisis we are working through. We hope this can be shared work with all levels of government.

Signed,

Sunshine House, Inc.

Spence Neighbourhood Association

Central Neighbourhood Association

West Central Women's Resource Centre

Winnipeg Harm Reduction Network

Resource Assistance for Youth

Siloam Mission

End Homelessness Winnipeg

N'Dinawemak

Manitoba Harm Reduction Network

Sexuality Education Resource Centre Manitoba Inc (SERC)

The Link: Youth and Family Supports

Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg, Inc.

Giigewigamig First Nation Health Authority

Nine Circles Community Health Centre

Northwest Interlake Harm Reduction Network

Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation

Brandon and Area overdose Awareness Inc

The Women's Resource Centre (Brandon, Manitoba)

Play it Safer Network (Flin Flon, Manitoba Harm Reduction Network)

Play It Safer Network (The Pas/OCN, Manitoba Harm Reduction Network)

The Selkirk Friendship Centre

MFL Occupational Health Centre

Hope Centre Health Care, Inc.

Substance Consulting

North End Women's Centre

Mount Carmel Clinic

Aboriginal Health and Wellness Clinic

Smart recovery Brandon Manitoba
Survivor's Hope Crisis Centre
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg
Zaagi'idiwin Full Spectrum Indigenous Doulas
Manitoba Health Coalition
Safer Choices Northern Network (SCNN)
Bar None Winnipeg
Overdose Awareness Manitoba
North Point Douglas Women's Centre
Manitoba Moms Stop the Harm Advocacy Group
Winnipeg Police Cause Harm
Recovery Day Brandon
Under One Roof - Crisis Prevention Task Force
WE24: West End Twenty Four Hour Safe Space
Peg City Kindness Crew
Chelsea Grove
Ken St. George on behalf of Albert House, Inc.
Interlake Reserves Tribal Council
Sex Workers of Winnipeg Action Coalition (SWWAC)
Art City, Inc.
West Broadway Community Organization
Of No Fixed Address Advocacy Radio
Police-Free Schools Winnipeg
Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1505
Women's Health Clinic
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Manitoba
Manitoba Young New Democrats

Young United Church
Interlake FASD Coalition
Centre de santé Saint-Boniface
Klinic Community Health
Main Street Project
Manitoba Association of Community Health
Northern Regional Health Authority
Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin, Inc. (KIM)
The START Program
1JustCity, Inc.
Hope Mennonite Church Justice Team
Joanna Lynch, MD, CCFP(AM), FCFP, President of the Manitoba College of Family Physicians
Chrissy Rowan, Selkirk Primary Care Clinic