



October 29, 2019

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau  
Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

One in five Canadians experience a substance use or mental health problem in any given year. The impact of opioid use in Canada has reached catastrophic proportions. In 2018 alone, there were 4,460 deaths, meaning that there was one opioid related death every 2 hours in Canada. Despite this, Canadians face numerous barriers to accessing lifesaving services for problematic substance use. An average of 10 Canadians dies by suicide each day. In 2012, 1.6 million Canadians reported that their needs for mental health services were not fully met.

The current approach to the opioid crisis and the mental health needs of Canadians more generally are lacking when it comes to recognizing health and wellbeing as a human right - acknowledging the importance of mental health care and services for problematic substance use is essential for working towards a reduction in health disparities.

As national organizations, representing over 238,000 professionals on the front lines of service delivery, we urge the re-visioning of mental health care which recognizes its inseparable relationship with substance use and takes into consideration the structural dimensions limiting access and care.

To ensure that mental health and substance use receives the federal attention required for change, we the undersigned, encourage the creation of a new Cabinet position: *Minister of Mental Health and Wellbeing*.

The creation of a federal Minister of Mental Health and Wellbeing would highlight the importance of considering the various factors contributing to mental health and wellbeing, including the intersection with substance use. Furthermore, the creation of such an office would affirm, complement, and support the many excellent initiatives ongoing in different provinces and territories to address mental illness and support mental health and recovery, including dedicated strategies and plans to address suicide and the opioid crisis. Such an office would help to coordinate and advance Canadians access to needed care for mental illness and problematic substance use across the country.

In your previous mandate, your government demonstrated national leadership by enacting a public health approach to substance use as well as coordinating significant investments with the provinces' and territories' in mental health. Consequently, we know your government understands the critical importance of supporting mental health and well-being. This new *Minister* would cement mental health as a fiduciary, social, and philosophical priority in our country.

Sincerely,



Jan Christianson-Wood, MSW, RSW  
President  
Canadian Association of Social Workers



Paul Sawchuk MD, CCFP, FCFP, MBA  
President  
The College of Family Physicians of Canada



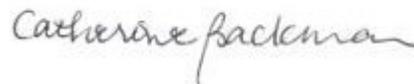
Ian R. Nicholson, Ph.D., C.Psych.  
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Dr. Sandy Buchman, MD, CCFP (PC),  
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President  
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Catherine Backman, PhD, Reg. OT (BC),  
FCAOT  
President  
Canadian Association of Occupational  
Therapists

cc. The Honorable Andrew Sheer, Leader of the Opposition, Conservative Party of Canada  
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party  
Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois