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GOVERNMENT OF CANADA APPROVES NEW TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR OPIOID USE DISORDER

The opioid crisis continues to be one of the most serious public health issues in Canada's recent history. Tragically, between January 2016 and September 2018, 10,337 Canadians lost their lives to an opioid-related overdose. Increasing access to treatment and harm reduction options, as well as funding research to help determine what interventions are most effective, are key elements in addressing the opioid crisis.

Today, the Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, Minister of Health, announced that people seeking treatment for severe opioid use disorder will have access to two new treatment options. Health Canada has approved injectable hydromorphone for use as a treatment for severe opioid use disorder in adults. Diacetylmorphine was also added to the List of Drugs for an Urgent Public Health Need following a request by Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam. This action makes it possible for all provinces and territories to import this drug for the treatment of opioid use disorder. Evidence clearly shows that these medications can help sta-

bilize and improve the health of some patients, including increasing their retention in treatment programs.

Health Canada's instructions on how injectable hydromorphone is to be used are clear that it should be administered only under the supervision of a physician experienced in the treatment of severe opioid use disorder and trained in injectable opioid agonist therapy in accordance with provincial or territorial professional requirements and guidelines, as applicable.

Minister Petitpas Taylor also announced 33 new initiatives to develop educational resources for health practitioners on safer opioid use and effective treatments, control infectious diseases among people who use opioids, and provide effective evidence-based treatments and practices for people with opioid use disorder.

The new treatment options and investments in new projects are an important part of the Government of Canada's efforts to expand access to safer alternatives to the contaminated illegal drug supply for people at risk

of overdose, to provide Canadians with access to innovative treatment options, and to support provincial and territorial health systems and healthcare professionals in treating Canadians with opioid use disorder.

"Problematic substance use is a treatable medical condition and recovery is possible. However, we know that existing treatments do not work for everyone. Today's announcement provides people with opioid use disorder access to two new evidence-based treatment options. This, along with the important work being carried out by the funding recipients, is part of the Government of Canada's efforts to support those most affected by the opioid crisis here in Ontario, and across the country."

The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor
Minister of Health

"Expanding the availability of diacetylmorphine, or pharmaceutical-grade heroin, for opioid agonist treatment will help save lives. Expanded availability means the drug can now be imported anywhere in Canada for healthcare professionals to use in the treat-

ment of severe opioid use disorder, providing more options to support patients with opioid use disorder."

Dr. Theresa Tam
Chief Public Health Officer

"The newly announced funding from CIHR will support our research on the Ontario Naloxone Program for Pharmacies, a provincial program that allows pharmacists to provide take-home naloxone at no charge to residents of Ontario, including individuals at high risk of overdose and death. By evaluating this program and its impact, we'll be able to provide insight into this strategy for all governments looking for evidence-based policies to support harm reduction. The support from CIHR will help inform how we tackle opioid-related overdose and death through a multi-faceted approach."

Dr. Tony Antoniou
Scientist, Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, St. Michael's Hospital
Quick Facts

From January 2018 to September 2018, 73% of accidental apparent opioid-related deaths involved fentanyl or fentanyl-related substances.

Safe supply is an approach that focuses on saving lives by using existing pharmaceutical-grade medications as an alternative to highly toxic street drugs for people at risk of overdose. It can also help establish pathways to care and treatment for people with substance use disorder.

Canada is the first country to approve injectable hydromorphone as a treatment for severe opioid use disorder. Studies have shown that injectable hydromorphone and diacetylmorphine (prescription heroin) have been successful in helping to stabilize and support the health of some patients with opioid use disorder, including increased retention in treatment programs. Both of these drugs are used in the treatment of substance use disorder in other countries with recognized success.

The Government of Canada has taken a number of actions to address the illegally produced, highly toxic drug supply, including:

proposing an \$8.1 million investment through Budget 2019 to support efforts to expand access to a safe supply of prescription opioids to help protect

people with problematic opioid use from overdose and death;

committing \$22.3 million through Budget 2019 to increase access to naloxone and opioid overdose response training in underserved communities;

reducing regulatory barriers to evidence-based treatments for substance use disorder (e.g., making methadone more easily available to healthcare providers);

funding the development of guidelines for injectable agonist opioid treatment; and

supporting safe supply pilot projects.

Through Budget 2018, the Government of Canada announced a \$150 million Emergency Treatment Fund. Agreements have now been signed with all provinces and territories. In January 2019, the governments of Canada and Ontario signed a bilateral agreement, committing more than \$102 million to help increase access to evidence-based treatment services for people with substance use disorder in the province.

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