



August 18, 2021

The Honourable John Horgan, MLA  
Premier of British Columbia  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

**\*Delivered Electronically\***

Dear Premier Horgan:

The Prince George Chamber of Commerce, our more than 700 members, and the community-at-large, are gravely concerned with the increasing negative impacts of crime and anti-social behaviours associated with the delivery of needed social programs in the City of Prince George. Complex social issues such as mental health and addiction are serious societal problems, and Prince George is certainly not alone in working to support those affected, while also striving to create improved social outcomes. The negative social outcomes from these systemic problems affect many aspects of a community, including but not limited to, the business community that supports and sustains a thriving community. There is a shared concern among many communities throughout British Columbia that current programs are making things worse in the long term.

We fully support the efforts to help those who struggle with mental health, addictions, poverty and homelessness. It is a shared responsibility, as citizens, to support those in need and to work to continuously improve our communities for all to prosper and enjoy. However, our current trajectory is very concerning. While 'harm reduction' has proven to be beneficial in limiting the spread of communicable disease amongst the at-risk population, and has an important role in saving lives in the short term, it has done little to keep communities safe and clean for all to enjoy. The burden of unsafe paraphernalia being left in doorways, planters, parks and green spaces has increased the potential for residents of all ages to come into contact with these unsafe materials. This is not to mention the prolific drug trafficking, property crime, and incidents of violence that harm businesses, their employees, their customers, and the community writ-large.

Furthermore, BC's harm reduction strategy in its current form is not adequately reducing harm in the longer term for the very citizens it purports to support. Understanding the rationale for 'safe supply' as an addition to existing harm reduction strategies, we feel this is not a long term strategy in itself, and will likely further proliferate the problems within communities. The current regime of harm reduction policies implemented in Prince George and other communities do nothing to engage these populations, or better understand the needs of those currently on our streets consuming harmful and dangerous illicit drugs.

As we begin to emerge from the most significant economic challenge of our times, we cannot continue to move forward without the necessary support of the Provincial Government to ensure businesses can safely and effectively open, while patrons and visitors can safely access business districts.

Through the BC Chamber of Commerce annual policy process, numerous policy opportunities have been passed by delegates and brought forward for the Government to consider. These policies present Government with more foundational ideas to deliver on behalf of communities throughout BC.

In particular, we would like to draw your attention towards:

To fully assist those impacted by mental health and addictions, we must first understand how they have arrived at this place. The Prince George Chamber of Commerce would fully support a model that provides the necessary tools and resources to at-risk populations, with a caveat that counsellors and aide workers be on-site to spend time with individuals to engage, assist and collect information to better develop strategic programming driven to true change and help.

Senator Larry Campbell was a champion for the 'Four Pillars' approach – an approach that has been abandoned in favour of near singular focus on harm reduction strategies. Unfortunately, we've witnessed that current strategies have largely increased the harm and reduced the help. We believe, as do many British Columbians, that wrap around services with real opportunities for help, needs to be a focus moving forward in communities throughout BC.

Ignoring the frustration of local communities by failing to reduce the impacts of social programs will only hurt long term efforts to help those in need, as government and social agencies will lose the support of the local communities which are essential to the delivery of effective social programs.

In addition to the above, we are proposing a BC-wide training program for municipalities - training their workforce to work alongside persons at-risk, while remaining safe in the handling of personal effects and paraphernalia. Programs need to assist municipalities in partnering with our business districts to ensure the right tools and resources are in place. For example, WorkSafeBC could be empowered to deliver imperative training and development opportunities directly to communities and businesses for the safety of workers in BC.

The Prince George Chamber of Commerce is committed to being a partner in this process. As such, we will continue to collect stories from our members and supportive organizations to share with Government. We will continue to drive for change – our members, residents of Prince George, and indeed, all British Columbians - deserve the opportunity and dignity of living in a place that truly cares for it's citizens in need of support, and protects, and in a safe community. .

Let's work collaboratively to tackle the issues.

Sincerely,



Todd Corrigan, CEO

Prince George Chamber of Commerce

CC:

- Honourable David Eby Q.C., Attorney General of British Columbia
- Honourable Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
- Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
- Honourable Josie Osborne, Minister of Municipal Affairs
- Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation
- Shirley Bond, MLA, Prince George - Valemount, Interim Leader of the Official Opposition
- Mike Morris, MLA, Prince George – Mackenzie, Opposition Critic for Public Safety and Solicitor General
- Trevor Halford, MLA, Surrey – White Rock, Opposition Critic for Mental Health and Addictions
- Lyn Hall, Mayor, City of Prince George