May 25, 2022

Re: City Motion on 4-pillars and Indigenous Harm Reduction Policy Brief incorporation into city mandates

I am in support of the City of Winnipeg motion that supports a 4-pillars approach to harm reduction - specifically supervised consumption sites, decriminalization of possession, safe supply, and diversion. I further support the city adopting the Indigenous Harm Reduction Policy brief as a guiding document that highlights decolonizing and indigenizing, holistic and wholistic approaches, inclusivity, and innovative and evidence-based solutions.

I recognize that current drug law and drug policy adversely impacts BIPOC populations as being overly represented in possession charges, arrests, and convictions. The failed war on drugs has caused great harm to people who use drugs (PWUD), and continues to funnel PWUD into the justice system rather than the healthcare system, despite problematic substance use being a health issue. It has wasted resources and tax dollars on policing, court costs and corrections, when these funds could be used to strengthen harm reduction and public health initiatives, mental health services, community programming, and housing initiatives; all of which are evidence-based interventions.

I also ask that the city explore a city wide exemption for possession as a step in the right direction toward moving drug policy out of a criminalized sphere and into the realm of health and social services. This shift would also remove many of the barriers associated with creating safe consumption services, drug testing services, safe supply, and a variety of other harm reduction measures that are desperately needed to address the toxic drug supply epidemic that is ravaging our city; a crisis that has resulted in 407 overdose/drug poisoning deaths in the province of Manitoba in 2021 - the highest recorded number to date.

I support this initiative and asks that the community consultations that follow include and prioritize the expertise of people who use drugs. I ask that our municipal and provincial leadership work with the community to collaborate on evidence-based solutions together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lisa Lazarus, PhD, MPH