Dear candidates for mayor of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_:

On Oct. 3, you received an invitation by email from my professional association, the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario (RNAO), to sign a pledge promising to, if elected, seek the decriminalization of illicit drugs within the boundary of our municipality. I am urging you sign that pledge. If you have done so already, my deepest thanks.

As you know, for many years, Ontario has been experiencing an overdose crisis. Preliminary data from Public Health Ontario shows that there were 2,880 opioid-related overdose deaths in Ontario in 2021 - an average of eight deaths per day. In addition, there were 17,073 emergency department visits and 2439 hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses last year. Opioid-related overdoses in our municipality contributed to these alarming statistics.

As the email from RNAO said, every overdose death in our city is preventable. And, decriminalization of simple possession of drugs is an effective way of preventing overdose deaths. Continued criminalization of drug possession stigmatizes substance use and people who use certain substances. This stigma creates barriers to health care and forces people to use alone – factors that increase the risk of death from overdose.

Decriminalization at the municipal level is not a new idea. In June 2021, the [Ontario Big City Mayors](https://www.ontariobigcitymayors.ca/news/details.php?id=747) called for drug decriminalization in order to address the growing opioid epidemic. City councils in [Montreal](https://www.mtlblog.com/montreal/montreal-is-now-asking-the-canadian-govt-to-decriminalize-simple-drug-possession), [Vancouver](https://council.vancouver.ca/20201125/documents/cfsc20201125min.pdf) and [Edmonton](https://pub-edmonton.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=031660bb-fe77-4613-b5f8-8063b5f5c6c0&Agenda=PostMinutes&lang=English) have appealed to the federal government to decriminalize simple drug possession in their cities. The [Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police](https://www.cacp.ca/news/canadas-police-leaders-recommend-adopting-a-public-health-led-diversionary-approach-to-illicit-subst.html) and the [Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police](https://www.oacp.ca/en/news/oacp-statement-decriminalization-for-simple-possession-of-illicit-drugs.aspx) have also endorsed decriminalization of simple possession.

I am asking you to join them all in recognizing that substance use should be treated as a health issue, not a criminal matter. You can do this by signing RNAO’s pledge. My vote depends on it.

Sincerely,

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