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

Congratulations on your candidacy for mayor of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I thank you for your contribution to the democratic life of the city. On behalf of the members of the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario (RNAO) who live in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I am writing to ask you to pledge your support for decriminalization of simple possession of illicit drugs within the municipality.

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 2,439 hospitalizations for opioid-related overdoses last year. Opioid-related overdoses in our municipality contributed to these alarming statistics.

Every overdose death in our municipality 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 the attached pledge to put before council a motion calling on the federal government to decriminalize simple possession within the municipality of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Kindly sign, scan, and send a copy of the pledge to Ann-Marie Morris, RNAO policy team coordinator, (amorris@RNAO.ca), copied to me ([your email address]), on or before Oct. 17, 2022. We will share information about which candidates for mayor have (and have not) signed through our social media channels and on our website, reaching thousands of nurses and others who live and vote in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. We hope that you, too, will use your social media platforms to demonstrate your commitment to decriminalization and tag RNAO on Twitter (@RNAO) and use the hashtag #DecriminalizeNow.

For more information about decriminalization and other harm reduction responses to this public health crisis, please see RNAO’s [overdose fact sheet](https://rnao.ca/sites/default/files/2022-09/RNAO%20fact%20sheet%20-%20Overdose%20crisis%202022.pdf) and [political action bulletin](https://rnao.ca/sites/default/files/2022-09/Opioid%20overdose%20crisis%20PAB-September%202022.pdf).

We wish you the best of luck in the upcoming election and thank you in advance for signing the pledge. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ann-Marie (amorris@RNAO.ca).

Sincerely,

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