



[Ontario's Big City Mayors call for action on ambitious mental health and addictions plan](#)

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June 18, 2021 – Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM) are joining mental health leaders and Chiefs of Police in calling for the decriminalization of controlled substances and the continued creation and funding of Mental Health Crisis Response Units. These units combine trained mental health professionals and police officers to respond to identified low-risk crisis calls and wellness checks.

OBCM is not alone in advocating in these changes. Mental health and substance use experts have been advocating for reforms for years. Opioid poisonings, hospitalizations, and deaths have been on a dangerous incline. The Ontario Drug Policy Research Network reported 2,426 opioid-related deaths in 2020, a 60 per cent increase over 2019, making 2020 the worst year on record since tracking began.

It has never been clearer that action is needed now. While the provincial government is responsible for funding and coordinating mental health and addictions supports, all levels of government have a role to play in improving services for our residents.

"Now is the time to be bold," said Jeff Lehman, Chair of OBCM and Mayor of Barrie. "Our call for policy change is consistent with OBCM's growing mandate to advocate for the resources our residents and communities need. The province's *Roadmap to Wellness* plan is a good plan and we want to work together to implement it vigorously. We look forward to working closely with the province to bring this plan into reality."

"Mental Health Crisis Response Teams are tried and tested in municipalities across the province. Many OBCM members have first-hand experience with programs like COAST and IMPACT, and have seen significant outcome improvements for residents," said Marianne Meed Ward, Mayor of Burlington and Co-Chair of the Mental Health Working Committee. "We are calling for a consistent program to be mandated province wide with the necessary funding to support and ensure their success."

"The federal government has taken evidence-based action before and we are asking them to do it again by decriminalizing controlled substances to enhance public safety and save lives," said Darrin Canniff, Mayor of Chatham-Kent and Co-Chair of the Mental Health Working Committee. "The OBCM caucus is

eager to collaborate with the federal government on how we better improve people's lives who are struggling with substance use and reduce societal trauma associated with deaths.”

Recommendations put forward by OBCM can be found here in its Mental Health and Addictions Policy Paper.

About Ontario's Big City Mayors

Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM), formerly known as the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario, includes mayors of 29 single and lower-tier cities with a population of 100,000 or more, who collectively represent nearly 70 per cent of Ontario's population. OBCM advocates for issues and policies important to Ontario's largest cities.