



Media Release

For immediate release

Half of health leaders believe response to opioid crisis is inadequate Challenges include lack of an effective strategy and awareness

VANCOUVER (June 12, 2017) – A staggering 49% of the nation’s health leaders say the main challenge in dealing with Canada’s opioid crisis is the “lack of an effective strategy.” An equally startling finding of a new HealthCareCAN/Canadian College of Healthcare Leaders poll of hospital CEOs, department heads, medical directors and other senior health administrators is that 29% believe “lack of awareness” is one of the primary challenges in dealing with a crisis that a federal advisory panel last week indicated took an average toll of at least seven Canadian lives each day of 2016.

“The findings really highlight the need for dissemination of innovative solutions across the entire spectrum of opioid use and abuse, from prevention and harm reduction to surveillance and treatment,” says HealthCareCAN President and CEO Bill Tholl. “That’s why we’re so pleased that (federal Health Minister) Jane Philpott has agreed to meet with more than two dozen of our members at an invitational roundtable to discuss best practices and solutions to the crisis. There’s just so much more that needs to be done, whether that’s in the development and implementation of strategies, standards or guidelines, or with respect to training, coordination and data gathering.”

The IPSOS poll, conducted for HealthCareCAN and the Canadian College of Healthcare Leaders in the run-up to the National Health Leadership Conference (NHLC) being held in Vancouver June 12-13, found that 85% of health leaders believe there is a national opioid crisis, as compared with 61% of average Canadians surveyed in a separate poll of the general public. The variation appears to be a function of the health leaders being forced into familiarity with the consequences of the crisis as some 66% say their organization has been directly impacted, largely in the forms of increased hospitalizations, as well as a squeeze on budgets and staff. A “lack of resources” (47%) and a “lack of staff” (26%) are among other challenges identified by health leaders in responding to the crisis.

Minister Philpott last fall convened a summit on the crisis. Health leaders have lauded the federal government for recently investing \$100 million over five years in the new Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy. The poll indicates that 80% of the nation’s health leaders believe that more steps must be taken to find lasting solutions to the crisis, a sentiment recently echoed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a speech to the mayors of the nation’s largest cities.

Some 20% believe the primary role of the federal government in addressing the opioid crisis is to “provide funding.” That’s followed by “information/awareness/prevention” (19%); “set-up/implement effective plans/strategies” (14%); “regulation/control of opioid/drugs” (14%); “provide resources” (12%); “support for harm reduction/safe injection sites” (11%); and “developing standards/guidelines” (10%). The leaders believe the primary role of provincial governments is similar, though they should also be more active in providing treatment plans/counselling.

The survey findings of health leaders are available [here](#); the public survey findings are available [here](#).

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Among other aspects of the opioid crisis to be addressed by the NHLC is the question of opioid prescribing. The sessions include one on Canada's Health Infoway's endeavor to create a multi-jurisdiction e-prescribing service to help reduce opioid misuse. Among best practices to be shared with Minister Philpott at the roundtable is a mandatory safe prescribing course that has been developed in Newfoundland & Labrador.

Minister Philpott will also deliver the welcome address to the gathering, which this year is structured around the theme "Value-Based Healthcare: embracing a patient and family-centered approach." The conference is sponsored annually by the Canadian College of Health Leaders and HealthCareCAN, the national voice of healthcare organizations and hospitals. NHLC will be held at the Westin Bayshore Hotel in Vancouver. Click on www.nhlc-cnls.ca for more information.

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