

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? Liberal government reinstates prescription heroin for addicts



All political parties in Canada can agree that drug addiction is an important issue for our country.

Highly addictive drugs, such as heroin and opioids, can take a horrible toll on families, lead users into criminal activity and destroy lives. The previous Conservative government took decisive steps to protect Canadians and our communities from these dangerous substances and the terrible consequences they far too often bring with them. One such step was to protect the integrity of the Special Access Program. However, as of Sept. 7, 2016, the current Liberal government took its own steps to reverse our previous government's policy with respect to this program, which now allows Canadian doctors the ability to prescribe patients with severe opioid addiction prescription heroin as a form of treatment.

As stated on Health Canada's website, the Special Access Program, "provides access to nonmarketed drugs for practitioners treating patients with serious or life-threatening conditions when conventional therapies have failed, are unsuitable, or unavailable." The intent of the program was not to give drug addicts access to illicit drugs. Our previous Conservative government closed this loophole in 2013, which up to that point allowed for the enabling of illicit drug addiction under the guise of treatment.

Our previous Conservative government sought to ensure the Special Access Program's intent was protected and thus removed the ability of doctors to prescribe illicit, dangerous drugs to patients battling severe opioid addiction. When former minister of Health Rona Ambrose made the announcement Oct. 3, 2013, the changes in the regulations included products containing heroin, unauthorized forms of cocaine, or other restricted drugs (such as LSD, ecstasy, "magic" mushrooms, and "bath salts"). Moreover, there are other approved, recognized and safe medical treatments made available to doctors to be used to treat addiction, such as methadone.

The Official Opposition is disappointed that current Health Minister Jane Philpott has chosen to reverse our previous policy to protect the integrity of Health Canada's Special Access Program. In doing so, the Health Minister is facilitating access to prescription heroin.

The Official Opposition takes drug addiction very seriously, as demonstrated by our actions in 2013 to close the loophole in the Special Access Program. The current Liberal government's reversal of our previous Conservative government's policy is regretful and is a major step backwards for those battling opioid addiction by facilitating access to prescription heroin instead of focusing efforts on treatment and recovery.