

A challenge to Canadian politicians:



Step up and do better!

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The Honourable Sandy Silver
Premier of Yukon
Office of the Premier
Yukon Government Administration Building
PO Box 2703
Whitehorse, YK
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Dear Premier Silver,

The upcoming coming Premiers' Conference is happening at a crucial time. Across Canada politicians at all levels — federal, provincial, territorial and municipal — acknowledge that the nation's mental and health and addictions crisis is growing. It's a crisis that affects every Canadian directly or indirectly.

A prime purpose of the Premiers' conference is to "show leadership on issues that matter to Canadians." The mental health and addictions crisis matters to Canadians. I encourage you to discuss it at the conference. If it's not on the agenda, it should be. If it's not, find time to talk about it. Even brief talks over breakfast, during coffee breaks, in the hallways, or in hospitality suites can be important.

For more than a year, I've written to every Member of Parliament, every federal and provincial Health Minister and every Premier advocating for changes to the mental health and addictions system. Recently, I've started approaching municipal politicians. From those who've written back or with whom I've been able to talk, there's a common theme. They agree mental health and addictions is a national issue but there's no national leadership.

You may recall from my previous letter, I'm advocating for the creation of a Secretariat for Mental Health and Addictions in the Prime Minister's Office to provide much needed national leadership on this issue. A secretariat does not solve the mental health and addictions crisis but it does create national leadership and focus on a serious situation which destroys individual lives and tears families apart. Occasional meetings of Ministers of Health are inadequate to deal with the complex issues surrounding mental health and addictions. When they do meet, the Ministers

are too busy talking about other matters to give mental health and addictions the in-depth discussion it needs and deserves.

Two Premiers have connected the lack of national leadership with creation of a secretariat in the PMO.

In a letter dated May 24, Yukon Premier Sandy Silver wrote:

“We also support further federal work on mental health and addictions, which could potentially include a Secretariat of Mental Health and Addictions as you propose. HSS (Yukon Department of Health and Social Services) and the Government of Yukon are open to discussing such a Secretariat if it is identified as a key initiative by the Prime Minister’s Office.”

In a letter dated May 16, Alberta Premier Rachel Notley wrote:

“Our government is interested in the concept of a federal Addiction and Mental Health Secretariat. Raising the profile of substance use and mental health issues and better coordinating the federal government response would benefit both Canadians managing substance use and mental health issues, as well as provincial and local governments. I encourage you to continue bringing attention to these issues and advocating for change across Canada, at all levels of government.”

When I met with the federal Minister of Health and talked with the Prime Minister last year, both expressed interest in a Secretariat for Mental Health and Addictions. Unfortunately, the Secretariat did not make it into the last federal budget.

When you meet with the other Premiers, I encourage you to push for national leadership on mental health and addictions — a secretariat for mental health and addictions. It will be a clear demonstration that politicians from all levels of government — federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and aboriginal — can and will work together to improve mental health and addictions care across Canada.

I look forward to hearing about the outcomes from the conference.

Step Up and Do Better! For all Canadians.

Regards,

Noah Irvine

PS. I have a website (www.stepupanddobetter.com) where you can see more about my advocacy efforts and sign up to receive occasional email updates. I’m on Facebook (@stepupanddobetter).