



## Premiers Highlight Key Justice and Social Issues

EDMONTON, July 19, 2017 – Premiers<sup>1</sup> concluded their meeting in Edmonton by looking at ways to advance shared objectives on critically important justice and social issues.

### Criminal Justice

Premiers reviewed the implications of the *R v. Jordan* decision on provincial and territorial justice systems, and discussed the solutions under consideration on how to reduce court delays while ensuring respect for victims, the rights of the accused persons and public safety. Possible solutions discussed included reforms to the use of preliminary inquiries, revisiting the use of mandatory minimum sentences, and the importance of appointing more judges to manage anticipated caseloads.

Premiers also reported on the means and measures they have taken so far to reduce court delays and the backlog of judicial proceedings. Premiers reiterated the importance of the federal government providing the required resources and measures to achieve these objectives, as well as quickly implementing the legislative solutions being identified jointly by FPT Ministers responsible for Justice at their September meeting.

### Cannabis

The federal government has made a decision to legalize cannabis. Cannabis legalization is a complex issue that requires a focussed approach by provinces and territories. To achieve better outcomes for Canadians as the provinces and territories plan for cannabis legalization, Premiers have established a Provincial-Territorial Working Group on Cannabis Legalization. This Working Group will report by November 1, 2017 to Premiers and identify common considerations and best practices to cannabis legalization and regulation, guided by the objectives of reducing harm, protecting public safety, and reducing illicit activity.

Premiers note that the administration and regulation, public education and law enforcement efforts necessary to support legalization will entail significant costs for provincial and territorial governments. The federal government, as the government advancing this policy change, needs to invest the appropriate resources to support cannabis legalization.

Premiers also noted that there are challenges associated with the federal government's proposed implementation date of July 1, 2018. Premiers reiterated that federal engagement and information sharing will be required in order to manage this transition properly. Issues that need to be resolved include:

- Road safety and enforcement mechanisms
- Preparation and training for distribution network
- Taxation arrangements and cost coverage
- Public education campaigns
- Supply, demand and relationship to black market

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<sup>1</sup> John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia, did not attend the 2017 Summer Meeting of Canada's Premiers.

Premiers will receive a report from the Working Group in November. They are concerned the federal timeline may be unrealistic, given the issues listed above. If these outstanding issues are not properly addressed by the federal government, provinces and territories will require an extension of the implementation date.

### **Opioids**

The opioid overdose epidemic in Canada has led to tragic loss of life and has had a devastating impact on families and communities across the country. Approximately 2,500 Canadians died from an opioid-related overdose in 2016, which is seven people each day. Premiers discussed the work that provinces and territories are undertaking in their own jurisdictions and stressed the importance of intergovernmental cooperation to mitigate this urgent and evolving issue on an emergent basis.

To combat this crisis, provinces and territories are strongly committed to using a harm reduction approach to mitigate this crisis and will continue to deploy a range of evidence-based tools to prevent further tragic deaths, as well as sharing best practices. Additional work must be done in cooperation with health professionals to adapt prescribing practices.

Premiers are pleased with the Government of Canada's work to approve new supervised consumption sites and encourage the federal government to consider further proposals. Premiers also called on the federal government to undertake further concrete actions to improve public safety in Canada:

- Provide greater support for enhanced RCMP/Canada Border Services Agency partnership funding;
- Reinstate federal RCMP resources to intercept opioids such as fentanyl and reduce importation and trafficking of opioids.
- Increase funding for equipment and training for the RCMP Clandestine Laboratory Enforcement and Response Team and support greater networking of provincial toxicological and poison control services.
- Federal officials should work directly with U.S. public health officials to identify best practices, risks and areas of cooperation in combatting this crisis.

### **Pharmaceutical Drug Coverage**

For a number of years, provinces and territories have been pioneering work to improve the affordability, accessibility and appropriate use of prescription drugs. This includes the work of the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance (pCPA) on brand name drugs, generic drugs, and special categories of drugs that bring forward particularly complex and difficult challenges. As of March 31, 2017, the pCPA's efforts have led to a \$1.28 billion a year in estimated combined jurisdictional savings.

Premiers noted that discrepancies persist between the prices of prescription drugs sold in Canada and those available in certain other countries. Premiers intend to continue to work collaboratively in order to further reduce drug prices.

To build on the success of this intergovernmental collaboration, Premiers also agreed to continue exploring opportunities to improve drug coverage for Canadians, recognizing the different needs and systems in place in each province and territory.

Premiers call on the federal government to continue to collaborate with provinces and territories on this important work and engage actively in discussions about establishing a National Pharmacare Plan to ensure Canadians have access to the medications that keep them healthy.

### **Health Procurement**

Premiers discussed the shared challenges associated with rising costs and demands in health service delivery, noting the ongoing need to drive innovation and focus on front-line care. Building on the success of the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance, Premiers committed to explore further collaboration in procurement of basic and specialized medical equipment.

### **Nutrition North Canada**

Premiers recognize the need to reduce the high cost of food and ensure availability in isolated northern communities. These costs are high because of remote geography, shipping costs, transportation infrastructure deficits and other issues including a lack of options related to agricultural development. High food costs place a burden on already vulnerable populations struggling with food insecurity and health issues. On an urgent basis, Premiers call on the federal government to increase the accountability and transparency of the federal Nutrition North Canada program so that the subsidy directly reduces the cost of food for residents of isolated communities.

### **Refugee Claimants**

Premiers discussed the importance of immigration and successful settlement of all newcomers, including refugees, and addressing the needs of asylum seekers with dignity, respect and security. Premiers call on the federal government to address the growing wait times for asylum claims to be processed, and to work with jurisdictions experiencing an influx of refugee claimants on a comprehensive, long-term plan which would include additional legal aid funding from the federal government.

### **National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**

Premiers have long called for a National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They continue to support Indigenous communities in their emphasis on the need to move forward with a family-centered approach that respects and honours those who have experienced loss of loved ones. Premiers also stressed the importance of the Inquiry meeting and engaging with Indigenous peoples in all jurisdictions.

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### **Media enquiries may be directed to:**

Cheryl Oates  
Media Relations  
Office of the Premier, Government of Alberta  
(780) 422-4905  
[premiers.communications@gov.ab.ca](mailto:premiers.communications@gov.ab.ca)