

The Honourable Randy Delorey
Minister of Health, Department of Health and Wellness
Barrington Tower, 1894 Barrington Street
P.O. Box 488
Halifax, NS
B3J 2R8

March 16th, 2018

Dear Minister Delorey,

RE: Hepatitis C treatment for incarcerated Nova Scotians

I am writing to express concern on behalf of Canada's infection control professionals (ICPs) about the lack of treatment for individuals living with Hepatitis C in Nova Scotia's correctional facilities.

Infection Prevention and Control Canada (IPAC Canada) is a multidisciplinary member-based association committed to public wellness and safety by advocating for best practices in infection prevention and control in all settings. Our organization is very troubled by the revelation that incarcerated individuals serving provincial sentences in Nova Scotia do not have access to the same drug regimen as everyone else in the province who is living with and seeking treatment for Hepatitis C.

As you are aware, limiting access to treatments that are otherwise available through the public health care system is widely perceived to be a violation of the *Canada Health Act*, and section 28 of the *Nova Scotia Corrections Act*, which requires accommodation of prisoners due to illness, disability or injury. Beyond these legal considerations, we urge you to consider the impacts not only on the people serving time in the corrections system, but all Nova Scotians. When incarcerated individuals, who have rates of Hepatitis C infection between 15%-30% compared to 0.6% among the general population, are released they continue to be at risk for spreading the disease.

Not only are correctional facilities a venue for the spread of infectious diseases, they can also be a venue for treatment. Vulnerable populations who are overrepresented in Hepatitis C cases are also overrepresented in the corrections system. Many of the people who can be treated while incarcerated may face substantial barriers to accessing health services when they leave the corrections system. By providing treatment for this curable disease in provincial facilities, your government will be taking active steps to decrease the overall burden of Hepatitis C on Nova Scotia's health care system by decreasing the infection rates overall.

We are not asking for special treatment for inmates. We are asking that inmates be treated equitably.

We urge you to view this not as another added expense, but as an opportunity to invest in the wellbeing of people who need assistance making a successful transition back into their workplaces and communities.

I would like to offer you the opportunity to speak with ICPs working in Nova Scotia who have experience and knowledge of the individual and public health impact of Hepatitis C to learn more about how the government will see a return on its investment if it takes the important step of providing treatment. If you have any additional questions regarding measures to improve infection prevention and control practices in correctional facilities we would be grateful for the opportunity to answer them and can be reached at info@ipac-canada.org.

I thank you for your consideration of this important issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Molly Blake RN BN MHS CIC
President, IPAC Canada