

November 16, 2021

Hon. David Lametti, PC, MP
Minister of Justice
Justice Canada
david.lametti@justice.gc.ca

Re: New Criminal Code offence to protect health workers from threats and violence, including online

Dear Minister Lametti:

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) to respectfully and urgently request federal legislative action to protect Canada's health workforce from increasing threats, harassment and intimidation. I respectfully request the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this grave situation.

As Canada's health workforce grapples with burnout and increasing staffing shortages another challenge has emerged. The very individuals who have endured difficult personal sacrifices to deliver care for Canadians, in some cases risking their lives for patients, are now enduring threats online and in health care settings as they seek to continue to care for patients and advocate for public health measures. I have personally received such threats. Every health care worker has a right to a safe and healthy work environment; yet, too many of my colleagues have been threatened and now fear for their safety.

The CMA and our membership of physicians and medical learners from across Canada were encouraged by the Prime Minister's commitment during the election campaign when he stated:

"There is no place for intimidation or threats at our hospitals and clinics. That's why we'll make it an offence to obstruct access to any building providing health services. We'll also make it an offence to intimidate/threaten any health care worker or anyone seeking treatment."

Sadly, violence against health care workers is not a new phenomenon. In 2015, the CMA General Council passed a resolution calling for: "the federal government to amend the Criminal Code by making it a specific criminal offence to assault health care providers performing their duties." In 2019, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health (Health Committee) made nine recommendations for federal action to prevent and address violence in health care settings.

The CMA is deeply concerned with the increasing number of instances of harassment and threats of violence directed at health care workers online. Evidence suggests this is disproportionately affecting female health care workers. It is unacceptable for health care workers to be victims of threats, harassment and violence in the provision of care to patients and as they advocate for the health and wellness of the public.

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While the recommendations by the Health Committee are laudable and should be implemented, these actions alone are no longer sufficient to address the escalation of threats, violence, harassment and intimidation facing Canada's health workforce.

The CMA strongly urges the federal government to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to establish a new offence in relation to the threats, violence, harassment and intimidation of health care workers and anyone seeking health care treatment. This new offence must extend to the threats, harassment and intimidation made on social media platforms.

Once again, I request the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the need for a new offence under the Criminal Code of Canada to protect Canada's health care workers.

Sincerely,



Katharine Smart, MD, FRCPC
President, Canadian Medical Association