

Title: "Policy Matters: Janet Butler-McPhee"

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Published in: *The Philanthropist*, Journal Policy Matters

ISSN 2562-1491

Date: April 15, 2019

Original Link: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2019/04/policy-matters-janet-butler-mcphee/>

Date of PDF Download: May 24, 2019

Policy Matters: Janet Butler-McPhee

By Janet Butler-McPhee

Later this year, Canadians will vote in the 43rd federal election. Many non-profit organizations, networks, and coalitions see elections as a critical opportunity to raise relevant public policy issues. Recently, the rules for charities engaging in public policy have become a prominent source of debate and discussion in government and the sector. As we countdown to the next election, The Philanthropist will be asking non-profit leaders what public policy issues are top of mind for them.

Name and organization: Janet Butler-McPhee, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

What current election issues might impact your work?

I am deeply concerned about the human rights of people who use drugs and their access to supervised consumption services, as well as to safer drug supply. Currently, Canada is in the midst of an unprecedented overdose crisis fuelled by a fentanyl-contaminated supply. People are needlessly dying at alarming rates, and the numbers are staggering. We need to talk openly about decriminalization and the health benefits of removing the criminal law from the lives of people who use drugs. This is not about perceived morality; it's about human rights and equitable access to health care for all people in Canada.

What issues would you like to bring more attention to in the election?

At the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, we work to promote the human rights of people living with, at risk of, or affected by HIV or AIDS, in Canada and around the world.

I have always worked from a rights-based, feminist perspective, and would like to see more attention given to the issues of people whose voices are typically excluded. In an election context, it's to address the vocal majority's concerns, but that's not how our democracy will truly advance. We should listen to sex workers who require safer working conditions, prisoners who need access to health care, people living with HIV who are being unjustly criminalized, and others — including Indigenous and other racialized people — whose human rights are being trampled. We must also adequately fund the organizations that are already doing this critical work.

Where can we learn more about these issues?

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

Prison Health Now

Canadian Coalition to Reform HIV Criminalization (CCRHC)

Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform