

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**Donald MacPherson, Canadian Drug Policy Coalition executive director, awarded honorary doctorate from Adler University**

*The award is the university's first-ever honorary doctorate in Canada and recognizes the overdose and drug poisoning crisis as a critical human rights and social justice issue of our time*

VANCOUVER, BC—Donald MacPherson, executive director of the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition and author of the seminal [Four Pillars Drug Strategy](#), today received Adler University's first-ever honorary doctorate in Canada. The university chose MacPherson for his pioneering work in drug policy reform, advocacy, and advancing the human rights and social inclusion of people who use substances.

"Donald MacPherson exemplifies the social justice work that we pursue at Adler University," said Joy MacPhail, Chair of the Board of Trustees at Adler University. "His cutting-edge efforts aim to improve public health and safety by reforming drug policies and by promoting the human rights of people who use substances. His work reminds us how much more needs to be done to address the overdose crisis and we hope our graduates are inspired by MacPherson's advocacy to advance social justice throughout their careers."

The award is also a recognition of the tragic loss of life caused by the illicit, unregulated drug market—a product of our flawed drug policies—as a defining human rights and social justice issue of our time. "I am honoured to receive this award from Adler University and the acknowledgement that the work to change archaic and harmful public policies is one of the challenges of our times," said MacPherson. "We are living through a time of catastrophic failure of the way we approach people who use criminalized drugs. Our systems are terribly broken and must be replaced."

In Canada, **12,813 people** have died from opioid-related deaths between 2016 and March 2019. Life expectancy has failed to increase for the first time in over four decades; and in British Columbia, overdose death is now the largest major cause of unnatural death, outpacing accidental deaths from homicides, suicides, and car accidents combined. The provinces of Alberta and Ontario have also been especially hard hit, with [Ontario last year recording a record number of fatalities from overdose](#).

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**- Donald MacPherson, Canadian Drug Policy Coalition**

MacPherson has been a guest lecturer for Adler University's public policy and administration program. All Adler University graduate-level degree programs are strongly rooted in the principles of social justice and offer students hands-on learning experiences at more than 200 community partner organizations. Many

students work at organizations that address the overdose crisis, providing mental health and other services.

MacPherson is also an adjunct professor in Simon Fraser University's Faculty of Health Sciences, of which the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition is a part, and co-author of *Raise Shit! Social Action Saving Lives* (2009) and *More Harm than Good: Drug Policy in Canada* (2016). He is involved in drug policy work at a local, national, and international level and was North America's first Drug Policy Coordinator at the City of Vancouver where he worked for 22 years. Full bio [here](#).

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### About the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition

The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (CDPC) is a coalition of 50 organizations and 4,000 individuals working to support the development of progressive drug policy grounded in science, guided by public health principles, and respectful of human rights. The CDPC operates as a project within Simon Fraser University in the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions. The CDPC seeks to include people who use drugs and those harmed by the war on drugs in moving toward a healthier Canadian society free of stigma and social exclusion. [www.drugpolicy.ca](http://www.drugpolicy.ca)

### About Adler University

Adler University is committed to improving individual and community health and well-being through positive social change. At the centre of downtown Vancouver, Adler University is an independent nonprofit institution of higher learning that offers graduate degree programs in psychology, counselling, and public policy. Established in 1952, Adler University has campuses in Vancouver, Chicago, and online. Adler University's mission is to continue the pioneering work of Alfred Adler, the first community psychologist, by graduating socially responsible practitioners, engaging communities, and advancing social justice. [www.adler.edu](http://www.adler.edu)