

# Decriminalization of People Who Use Drugs in BC

Adults 18+ in BC are allowed to possess ('hold') small amounts of certain illegal drugs for personal use (opioids, cocaine including crack and powder, methamphetamine, MDMA). Some exceptions apply.

## Why

Substance use is a public health issue, not a criminal one. Shame and fear of criminalization can drive people to use drugs alone, and using toxic drugs alone can be fatal.

Decriminalization will help reduce stigma and encourage people who use drugs to seek lifesaving services and care.

**Decriminalization is not legalization. These drugs remain illegal and unregulated and will not be sold in stores. Drug trafficking and related offences remain illegal.**



## Who

Adults 18+ in BC. It does not apply to people under the age of 18.



## When

From January 31, 2023, until January 31, 2026.



## Where

The Province of BC only.

## What will change ...

Adults 18+ in BC can possess ('hold') a total amount equal to or less than 2.5 grams of these illegal drugs for personal use:

- Opioids (including heroin, morphine, and fentanyl)
- Cocaine (including crack and powder cocaine)
- Methamphetamine (meth)
- MDMA (ecstasy)

Adults in possession of up to 2.5 grams of these drugs for personal use will not be arrested, charged, fined, or have their drugs seized. Instead, information about voluntary health and social supports will be offered.

Municipal bylaws on public use may apply.

## What remains illegal in BC ...

Any amount of any illegal drugs, including the four types listed, cannot be possessed:

- on the properties of elementary and secondary schools and childcare facilities
- in airports or other ports of entry; or
- within reach of a person operating a motor vehicle or watercraft

and cannot be

- imported or exported
- produced
- trafficked
- taken across a domestic or international border

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<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Implementation of the exemption to decriminalize the possession of certain illegal drugs for personal use in British Columbia
Purpose:	<p>This plan describes how the Government of BC will inform the public on when and how the exemption to decriminalize personal possession of certain illicit drugs will be implemented in the province, up to, including and after the exemption begins on January 31, 2023.</p> <p>The purpose of this plan is to outline, in detail, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions' integrated communications strategies to inform the public, families, municipalities, partners and businesses, with the aim of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increasing knowledge and awareness of the exemption;</li><li>• Preventing misinformation;</li><li>• Ensuring people in British Columbia, including visitors from other provinces and countries, understand the exemption and where and when it applies to them;</li><li>• Reducing the stigma around substance use;</li><li>• Communicating how to access local health and social supports for people found in possession of small amounts of illegal drugs listed in the exemption;</li><li>• Providing information on the exceptions and how they intersect with current provincial laws;</li><li>• Raising awareness on the ongoing risks related to the toxic illegal drug supply.</li></ul> <p>All materials will be shared and finalized in collaboration with Health Canada.</p> <p>Activities related to engagement will follow in a separate document.</p>
Background/ Context:	<p>Drug toxicity is now the leading cause of death amongst British Columbians aged 19 to 39, and the second leading cause of death overall. Since the declaration of the public health emergency in April of 2016, more than 10,000 British Columbians have died from illicit drug toxicity.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic permanently disrupted the supply trends of illicit drugs, leading to increased toxicity and unpredictability. During the first months of 2020, the concentration of fentanyl detected in illicit drug deaths was between four and eight percent. In the last months of 2021</p>

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	<p>this had increased to between 24 and 28 percent – a staggering increase in less than two years.</p> <p>On November 1, 2021, B.C. became the first province in Canada to seek an exemption from Health Canada under subsection 56(1) of the <i>Controlled Drugs and Substances Act</i> (CDSA) for adults (18 years of age and older) in the province to possess small amounts of certain illegal substances for personal use.</p> <p>On May 31, 2022, Health Canada granted B.C.'s request for an exemption, which will be in effect from Jan. 31, 2023 to Jan. 31, 2026. Since then, the Province has accelerated plans for implementation.</p> <p>The goal in the months leading up to Jan. 31 is to educate the public on the exemption to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of certain illegal substances for personal use, while also working to reduce the fear and shame associated with substance use that prevents people from reaching out for help.</p>
Communication Objectives:	s.13
Audiences:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People who have been impacted by the toxic drug crisis in British Columbia</li> <li>• People who use drugs and their families in British Columbia: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Housed, experiencing homelessness and in encampments.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Peer and people who are using drugs, drug user associations and groups</li> <li>○ Men between 19-49 who use drugs and are at increased risk of an overdose</li> <li>● British Columbians who may be concerned about what the exemption means for their family and community.</li> <li>● Parents who want to understand how this impacts their children.</li> <li>● Youth, including those under the age of 18, to whom the exemption does not apply, as well as students.</li> <li>● First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in British Columbia.</li> <li>● People visiting B.C.</li> <li>● Racialized groups and people in B.C.</li> <li>● Media and the general public.</li> </ul> <p>Secondary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Service providers in British Columbia.</li> <li>● Other provinces/territories including municipalities, international community.</li> <li>● Health authorities in British Columbia.</li> <li>● Police in British Columbia, including RCMP.</li> </ul>
Communication strategy	<p>This plan provides communications messages and tactics to support government's implementation of the exemption to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of certain illegal drugs in B.C. Working closely with Health Canada for comment and review, this plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Raise awareness of the exemption and what it means for people, including when it applies and how it intersects with other laws.</li> <li>● Raise awareness of how to access local health and social supports for people who use drugs, their families, friends, and communities.</li> <li>● Raise awareness of law enforcement's role in carrying out this exemption.</li> <li>● Facilitates a clear and easy to understand message to explain the exemption across traditional media channels, digital media and government owned assets, in multiple languages.</li> <li>● Communicate that youth are not included under the exemption and highlight specialized services to support young people dealing with mental health and substance use challenges.</li> <li>● Reiterate the dangers of the toxic drug supply and the health care services currently available to people, in order to reduce stigma as well as prevent toxic drug deaths and save lives.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduces the shame and fear often associated with drug use that prevents people from reaching out for help.</li> </ul>
Key Messages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We know that drug use is a public health matter – not a criminal justice one.</li> <li>Criminalization drives people to hide their drug use and often use alone. Given the increasingly toxic drug supply – using alone can be fatal.</li> <li>The federal government has approved an exemption so that adults (18 years and older) in B.C. are not subject to criminal penalties of small amounts of certain illegal drugs for personal use.</li> <li>This will help break down the barriers that prevent people from getting support and create new pathways to life-saving services.</li> <li>This exemption is not legalization. Drug trafficking and drug-related offences involving any illegal substances in any amounts remains illegal.</li> <li>Reducing stigma around drug use is a vital part of B.C.'s work to build a comprehensive system of mental health and substance use care for people throughout the province.</li> <li>The province has worked – and will continue to work – closely with the federal government, health authorities, local governments, Indigenous partners, police, people with lived experience and community service providers to implement, monitor and evaluate this exemption throughout B.C. from January 31, 2023 until January 31, 2026.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key terms</b> Exemption to decriminalize, stigma, harm reduction, toxic drug crisis</p>
Timeline:	<p><b>November 2020</b> – Premier Horgan directed Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to “<i>fast track the move toward decriminalization by working police chiefs to push Ottawa to decriminalize simple possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use.</i>”</p> <p><b>November 1, 2021</b> - Minister Malcolmson announces the province has submitted its application for an exemption under subsection 56(1) of the CDSA to Health Canada to decriminalize personal possession of illicit substances in the Province of BC.</p> <p><b>May 31, 2022</b> – Health Canada grants the province’s request for a subsection 56(1) exemption. Minister Malcolmson and Minister Bennett announced the granting of BC’s exemption in Vancouver.</p>

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**September/October 2022** – Focus groups convene and reported back to communications team.

**October 2022 to Jan. 31, 2023** – Supporting announcements

- Launch of the *Stop the Stigma* Campaign in paid media markets to reinforce addictions as a health care issue.
- Update Gov.bc.ca/decriminalization website with details on the exemption, including commons questions.
- Launch of program to train law enforcement on how to implement the exemption.
- Launch of search engine optimization and search engine marketing to drive people to government channels for more information on the exemption.
- Announce on Jan. 31, 2023 that the exemption is now in effect until Jan. 31, 2026.

Potential Issues: s.13

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Nations/ governance organizations may feel that their views may not have been taken into consideration (e.g., thresholds) and that they have not been adequately consulted on the implementation of the exemption.</li> <li>• What will be the indicators evaluated to ensure the exemption is working.</li> <li>• Post-implementation, some expectations will be that the number of overdose deaths will be reduced. It may not be a short term concrete result of the implemented exemption.</li> </ul>
Research:	<p><b>Public opinion polling</b> has been conducted by MMHA starting in March 2021 through to December 2021 as part of ongoing social market research.</p> <p>Key insights show strong support for decriminalization, with <b>81 percent</b> of B.C. residents against criminal charges for personal possession and <b>seven-in-ten</b> residents agreeing with B.C.'s proposal to decriminalize possession of small amounts of illegal drugs.</p> <p><b>Focus groups</b> were held virtually across the province in September and early October to gauge the level of concern and understanding among the general public, as well as Chinese and South Asian populations.</p> <p>Key findings from the focus groups include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear understanding of B.C.'s drug crisis and its many facets and implications. Supporters have a good understanding of the proposed new measures and strategies needed to stop the crisis. Those opposed to decriminalization are not persuaded by the government's position.</li> <li>• Regardless of level of support, many participants share the view that decriminalization is not a panacea to the current drug crisis B.C. is facing and should not be treated as such. Many want to see decriminalization incorporated as part of a multi-faceted plan that expands existing resources to better support those with mental health and addiction challenges.</li> <li>• Most participants understand the distinction between legalizing a drug, such as cannabis, and decriminalizing the possession of small amounts of certain drugs for personal use.</li> </ul>

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- Participants expressed an expectation of front-line criminal justice resources, no longer being used toward criminalizing the possession of small amounts of illicit drugs, being redirected to health care and social services to help alleviate stresses and reduce wait times.

**Consultations with people with lived and living experience** took place in early fall to inform key messages as well as mitigate risk of further stigmatizing people who use drugs. These sessions provided important contextual information to help frame communications materials across multiple channels for a variety of audiences.

Research was led by GCPE Headquarters, supported by the Partnerships and Engagement team in MMHA.

Below are the results of this consultation:

### **Personal experiences around criminalization**

Many of the attendees spoke about their personal experiences surrounding the shame and stigma related to substance use and how this can be amplified through criminalization. Attendees spoke about the trauma surrounding their experiences with criminalization and others shared the barriers this could bring. Criminalization can impact relationships with family, friends, employment, future opportunities, and, importantly, a person's self worth. The ramifications of criminalization can extend across a person's lifespan. Decriminalization is seen to be one tool the government can use to remove one of the possible layers of stigma around substance use and addiction, signaling that these are public health issues rather than criminal justice ones.

### **Concerns about decriminalization**

Similar to the gen pop focus groups, participants spoke about concerns they have around the implementation of decriminalization in B.C. There was a sentiment that decriminalization could raise alarm bells or increase fears for everyday people living in B.C. Community's fears around criminal activity related to substance use could easily be elevated if people believe that decriminalization is a runway to legalization. Similarly, participants spoke about community concerns around increased drug use, increases in drug paraphernalia in neighbourhoods as well as substance use related vandalism, though they identified that these problems mainly arise from the criminalization of substance use, which creates a lack of alternatives or options for people. Other concerns expressed were around the lack of



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	<p>deterrents to using drugs and leading more people to the toxic drug supply.</p> <p><b>Perceived benefits around decriminalization</b></p> <p>There was wide recognition in the group that decriminalization sends an important message that substance use, and addiction are issues of public health and not criminal justice. Criminalizing people who use drugs is seen to be a waste of money and the resources could be redirected into more proactive, preventative measures. One participant spoke about how criminalizing people who use drugs is the moral failing, not substance use. Participants also spoke about how avoiding interactions with the criminal justice system will allow people who use drugs more opportunities to take control of their lives and make informed decisions about their future, offering different pathways forwards. Other sentiments were around how decriminalization offered an opportunity for human potential to be returned back to society. Overall, decriminalization is seen as one of the tools government can use, but not the 'be all, end all' to the toxic drug crisis. Participants spoke about the importance of both harm reduction and treatment services, and that decriminalization may help people access these supports if there is less self-stigma and shame surrounding their behaviour.</p> <p><b>Public communications about decriminalization</b></p> <p>Participants spoke to the importance of striking a balance when educating the general public about decriminalization. There is a risk of elevating fears in the community and raising alarm bells, especially in the context of heightened awareness around public safety and repeat offenders in the media. On the other hand, there is an opportunity to send a message that addiction is a health condition and people experiencing addiction should not be criminalized. Further, participants felt that there were practical advantages to decriminalization for the government and people of B.C., and that the government should be open in sharing those. Providing clear links and reasons about why the government is taking this approach was also seen to be helpful to help the general population understand how decriminalization fits into the bigger picture.</p> <p><b>Public Opinion Research</b> will be going to market in December and will provide a baseline for further public understanding of decriminalization. More information can be found in <i>Section F</i>.</p>
Digital Strategy:	The plan will be supported by a comprehensive owned digital strategy to ensure there is a 'source of truth' regarding the exemption to

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decriminalize the possession of certain illicit substances on [gov.bc.ca](http://gov.bc.ca), while also leveraging government's social media presence.

### Owned:

- Facts about the exemption in plain language for a general audience available on this page: [www.gov.bc.ca/decriminalization](http://www.gov.bc.ca/decriminalization)
- This page has been updated and reviewed by Health Canada to answer the "6 W's" of the exemption.
- A factsheet to promote understanding of the exemption.
- This page will also be available in Punjabi, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, French and other relevant languages.
- Given the number of visits to the federal webpage on the exemption is from people located in BC, MMHA GCPE will work with the federal government to ensure the above website has similar messaging to the federal government's page on the exemption and vice-versa for consistent and clear information on the exemption.

### Shared:

- Social media posts – including a carousel post – on the Government of BC Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms.
- This material will be shared with Health Canada for review and cross promotion.
- Previous content posted on May 31, 2022 had a very good response and strong engagement.
- Social media posts will aim to meet the communications objectives described above, including increasing knowledge and understanding of the exemption, reducing stigma, and promoting mental health and substance use supports.
- Through answering questions and comments on social posts and in responses to direct messages, we can counter negative reaction from British Columbians and other groups who may not understand the purpose of the exemption.
- Pre-prepared content for MLAs and stakeholders to share with their audiences, including a toolkit with fact sheet/key messages (to be produced by MMHA comms shop), social media graphics (to be produced by digital).
- Social media posts will also be translated into various languages to increase the accessibility of this content.

*\*Please see Section C for a full digital strategy*

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Earned media	<p>Government Communications and Public Engagement will undertake a comprehensive, cross-ministry earned media campaign to support the implementation of the exemption to decriminalize the possession of certain illegal substances.</p> <p><b>Communications tools include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News releases, as well as translations into other languages such as Punjabi, traditional and simplified Chinese, and French.</li> <li>• Media availabilities</li> <li>• Targeted media interviews (print, radio and TV)</li> <li>• Technical briefings for in-community media, including Chinese and South Asian outlets</li> <li>• Stakeholder media</li> <li>• Coordinated announcement calendar</li> <li>• MMHA GCPCE will monitor media coverage and do outreach to correct any misinformation.</li> </ul> <p><i>*Please see Section C for a full earned media strategy</i></p>
Paid media	<p>Government Communications and Public Engagement have created a public awareness strategy to demonstrate how government is urgently responding to the ongoing toxic drug crisis and tackling escalating mental health and substance use concerns throughout the province.</p> <p><i>*Please see Section D for the full paid advertising plan.</i></p>
<b>Additional Tactics</b>	
Stop the Stigma campaign	<p>The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions will continue to support stigma reduction in the general population through the Stop the Stigma campaign. A paid media campaign will be in market in fall 2022 (October-November) with a focus on shifting the perception that addiction is a complex health condition, and not a choice.</p>
StopOverdoseBC.ca	<p>In addition to the above paid media campaign, we will also leverage the existing StopOverdoseBC.ca website. This website focuses on reducing stigma around substance use and communicating the dangers of the increasingly toxic drug supply.</p> <p>Content regarding the exemption to decriminalize possession of certain substances will be woven into <a href="https://stopoverdosebc.ca">StopOverdoseBC.ca</a> in a variety of ways, including:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational, plain-language information written and highlighted on the site for a general population audience</li> <li>• Story-telling, point-of-view information to build understanding and compassion</li> <li>• Linking strategies (to gov.bc.ca or other sites as appropriate)</li> </ul>
Wellbeing.gov.bc.ca	<p>The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions will also support content and wayfinding to mental health and substance use services through the <a href="#">Wellbeing website</a>.</p> <p>Specifically, content regarding the exemption will be available on a unique page – Stay Safer – which will be written for a general population audience.</p> <p>The site also features a guided search function to help people find services specific to their needs and their region.</p> <p>A resource card (print material) will be developed for community stakeholders (health authorities and law enforcement, for example) to provide to people who use drugs to ensure that health service information is available to them via the Wellbeing website.</p> <p><i>*See Section E for details</i></p>
Public Engagement Working Group	<p>MMHA will also continue to work closely with the existing province-wide public engagement working group, which is made up of health authority communications teams (focused on overdose response), in order to ensure that exemption messaging reaches communities effectively. This will also support the frame that substance use and addictions are public health issues.</p> <p>The Province will provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly updates about implementation of the exemption communications activities, both before and after January 31;</li> <li>• Communication materials, such as a digital toolkit with downloadable assets such as social media posts and imagery or print materials, to ensure consistent communication across channels;</li> <li>• Key messages for grassroots and organic outreach in communities.</li> </ul>
Stakeholder/Partner Engagement	<p>Opportunities for grassroots outreach (TBC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core Planning Table</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sub-working groups (research and evaluation, municipal, law enforcement readiness)</li> <li>• UBCM pre-conference panel session</li> <li>• First Nations town halls</li> <li>• Other Indigenous consultation and engagement</li> <li>• Community Action Teams</li> </ul>
Master KMQA	<p>The Ministry's Government Communication and Public Engagement team, in collaboration with program staff, have created a master KMQA document, which includes key messages and questions and answers from a variety of sectors, such as municipalities, childcare, First Nations and airports.</p> <p>This document will be a main source of truth and will be used to develop future communications materials related to the exemption.</p>
Post-implementation	<p>After implementation on January 31, 2023, the Ministry's Government Communications and Public Engagement team will continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to media requests, monitor media coverage, and do outreach to correct misinformation;</li> <li>• Continue to reference decriminalization, as one tool in B.C.'s fight against the toxic drug crisis, in communications materials and media requests;</li> <li>• Plan social media posts around relevant national/provincial days, such as International Overdose Awareness Day, National Addictions Awareness Week, as they relate to reducing stigma;</li> <li>• Write additional news releases/plan events surrounding the anniversary of decriminalization, when relevant. For example, the first or secondary year-anniversary of the implementation of the exemption or a benchmark in B.C.'s evaluation process;</li> <li>• The Ministry's communications and program teams will continue to respond to stakeholder questions around the exemption as they arise, using the master KMQA.</li> </ul>

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### SECTION A: Draft Critical Path

#### Critical Path

Timing	Activity	Status	Notes
<b>AUGUST 2022</b>			
October	<b>Stop the Stigma campaign in market</b>	<b>Status:</b> Scheduled <b>Lead:</b> Partnerships and engagement team	
<b>NOVEMBER 2022</b>			
Sunday, November 20-Saturday, November 26	<b>National Addictions Awareness Week</b>  Series of social media tweets for MSM to update on implementation progress and reiterate the importance of harm reducing supports.	<b>Status:</b> Proposed <b>Lead:</b> GCPE MMHA	
<b>DECEMBER 2022</b>			
December TBC	<b>Resource cards</b> are finalized, and printing begins.	<b>Status:</b> Proposed <b>Lead:</b> Partnerships and engagement team	
<b>JANUARY 2023</b>			
Early January TBC	<b>Resource cards</b> are distributed to organizations and law enforcement agencies across the province.	<b>Status:</b> Proposed <b>Lead:</b> Partnerships and engagement team	
Early January TBC	<b>ANNOUNCEMENT: Building new connections to care</b>  MMHA will release a province-wide news release and backgrounders about building new healthcare pathways to connect people to supports,	<b>Status:</b> On-going <b>Lead:</b> GCPE MMHA	

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	police training and building a system of mental health and addictions care, ahead of implementation on January 31, as well as an update on the evaluation.		
Mid-January	<b>Launch of paid search engine optimization and search engine marketing campaign</b> to drive people to drive people to government channels for more information on the exemption.	<b>Status:</b> Ongoing <b>Lead:</b> Partnerships and engagement team	
Monday, January 16 – Monday, January 23	Develop and finalize materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News release</li> <li>• KMQA</li> <li>• SN for MSM</li> <li>• EP</li> </ul>	<b>Status:</b> Proposed <b>Lead:</b> GCPE MMHA	
Monday, Jan. 30 TBC	<b>TECHNICAL MEDIA BRIEFING: Exemption to decriminalize</b>  Health Canada and MMHA officials will conduct a technical briefing via phone for media.	<b>Status:</b> Proposed <b>Lead:</b> Health Canada	Materials will be available for media 1 hour in advance.
Tuesday, Jan. 31 TBC	<b>ANNOUNCEMENT: Exemption to decriminalize possession of certain substances for personal use takes effect</b>  Minister Whiteside and stakeholders hold news conference following technical briefing to announce the exemption to decriminalize the possession of certain substances officially takes effect.	<b>Status:</b> Proposed <b>Lead:</b> GCPE HQ, GCPE MMHA, Health Canada	
Tuesday, Jan.31	Minister Whiteside does earned media (print, radio, TV) interviews, including in-language media.	<b>Status:</b> Proposed <b>Lead:</b> GCPE MMHA	Focus would be to get MJW on the CBC circuit, major news outlets and

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			in-language media.
End of January	Stop the Stigma radio buy campaign launches	<b>Status:</b> Ongoing <b>Lead:</b> GCPE HQ	
Tuesday, Jan. 31	New Wellbeing.gov.bc.ca website, and Stay Safer pages launch online on gov.bc.ca  Material distribution (community orgs, health authorities, etc.)	<b>Status:</b> Proposed <b>Lead:</b> Partnerships and engagement team (Wellbeing), GCPE GDX (gov.bc.ca)	
FEBRUARY 2023			
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### **SECTION B:** Draft News Release

Decriminalization of possession of certain substances for personal use comes into effect in B.C.

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- Since 2017, the Government of Canada has committed more than \$800 million to address the opioid overdose crisis and responded quickly to implement a wide range of measures to help save lives and meet the diverse needs of people who use drugs.

A Pathway to Hope: [https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BCMentalHealthRoadmap\\_2019.pdf](https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BCMentalHealthRoadmap_2019.pdf)

Stop Overdose BC: [StopOverdoseBC.ca](https://stopoverdosebc.ca)

**Contact:**

Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions  
Communications  
250 880-2378 (media line)

Health Canada  
Media Relations  
613-957-2983  
[media@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:media@hc-sc.gc.ca)

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Connect with the Province of B.C. at: [news.gov.bc.ca/connect](https://news.gov.bc.ca/connect)

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### SECTION C: Digital Communications

#### **Organic digital strategy for the exemption to decriminalize possession of certain illegal substances for personal use**

##### Goals and Objectives

- Created a landing page on [gov.bc.ca/decriminalization](http://gov.bc.ca/decriminalization) for information related to the exemption to decriminalize possession of certain illegal substances for diverse audiences.
- Produce plain language social media posts and graphic assets which meet the overall communications objectives of this plan, including:
  - Increase knowledge and understanding of the exemption to decriminalize possession of certain substances;
  - Reduce the stigma, often aimed at people who use drugs;
  - Promote mental health and substance use supports, including harm reduction programs and other relevant services.
    - Content could include information on how families can talk to their kids about the exemption and substance use.
  - Continued messaging on the danger of the illegal drug supply.
  - Overdose prevention messaging.
  - Messaging targeted at youth.
- Work with the federal government to ensure messaging is between provincial and federal websites about the exemption to decriminalize possession of certain illegal substances, such as including a link to HC's page on provincial page.
- Through community management response, have conversations about the exemption, answer questions, and share information to help change the perception of the exemption to decriminalize possession of certain substances and reduce the stigma towards people who use drugs.
- Provide content for Minister and MLAs to share with their audiences.

##### Calls to Action

- Encourage people to learn more at [gov.bc.ca/decriminalization](http://gov.bc.ca/decriminalization)
- Stop the stigma campaign - encourages people to have open conversations with their friends, family member or loved ones about substance use ([StopOverdoseBC.ca](http://StopOverdoseBC.ca)).

##### Duration

- TBC until March 2023.

##### Tags

- #DrugDecriminalization

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- #StopOverdose
- #StopTheStigma

### Proposed schedule

- Sunday, November 20-Saturday, November 26 – National Addictions Awareness Week
  - a post reminding people about the exemption to decriminalize possession of certain illicit drugs for personal use in B.C. and how it reduces stigma around drug use.
  - messaging about the increasingly toxic drug supply and risks associated with that.
- December 2022, particularly around the holidays
  - at least one post about available mental health supports for different audiences (e.g. adults, youth, post-secondary students)
  - at least one on reducing stigma and having open conversations with their friends and family.
- Tuesday, January 31, 2023
  - a post explaining that the exemption to decriminalize possession of certain substances is in effect, and what that means for British Columbians.
- February 2023
  - Post about how the exemption helps to reduce stigma so that people can connect to supports more easily.

### Sample content

The following content was posted on May 31, 2022, when the application for decriminalization was first announced. This provides a close example of how content can aim to increase knowledge and understanding of decriminalization and reduce the stigma.

### POST COPY

Stigma about drug use and addiction drives people to hide their drug use and use alone, which can be fatal.

BC is taking the next steps toward decriminalizing personal possession of small amounts of certain illicit substances, so that we can reduce the fear and shame associated with substance use – making it clear that substance use is a public health issue, not a criminal one.

Learn more: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/overdose/decriminalization> (link in bio)

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DRAFT POST #1

Commented [WKG1]: Will update when finalized.

Decriminalization is a powerful tool in the fight against stigma surrounding substance use. Starting on Jan. 31, 2023, adults aged 18 and over who possess 2.5g or less of certain illicit drugs for personal use will no longer face criminal charges. BC will be the first province to take this important step to treat substance use like a health issue, not a criminal justice one. Learn more about the steps we are taking to prepare for this change: [gov.bc.ca/decriminalization](https://gov.bc.ca/decriminalization)



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## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

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### DRAFT POST #2

Fear and stigma around drug use keeps people from asking for help and accessing the treatment and health care they need. Addiction needs to be treated as a health care issue, not a criminal one. Starting Jan. 31, 2023, adults aged 18 and over who possess 2.5g or less of certain illicit drugs for personal use will no longer face criminal charges in BC. Learn more: [gov.bc.ca/decriminalization](https://gov.bc.ca/decriminalization)

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

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DRAFT POST #3

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## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

easier for people to get treatment and access harm reduction services. Learn more:  
[gov.bc.ca/decriminalization](https://gov.bc.ca/decriminalization)

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## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

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## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

### Analytics & Insights

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## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

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- 3 livestreams (broadcast on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter)
- 3 image+text graphics (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- 1 Humans of BC photo (a first-person story published on Facebook and Instagram)
- 1 carousel (an album of text graphics posted on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

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**Engagements** are interactions with a post. These include likes, comments, shares, and more. The decriminalization posts received fewer engagements than average on Facebook, about average on Twitter, and much higher than average on Instagram.

**Reach** is the number of people who see a post. Twitter shares Impressions, which are the number of times a post is seen. The decriminalization posts had lower reach than average on Facebook, and higher than average on Twitter and Instagram.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

### SECTION D: Paid advertising campaign



## GCPE MARKETING BRIEF

### DECRIMINALIZATION PUBLIC AWARENESS STRATEGY

WINTER 2023

#### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:

Demonstrate government is urgently responding to ongoing toxic drug crisis and tackling escalating mental health and substance use concerns throughout the province.

#### CAMPAIGN GOALS

1. Raise public awareness and ensure understanding of exemption to decriminalize personal possession of certain illegal drugs in British Columbia
2. Update British Columbians on mental health and substance use services available throughout the province – identify new connections/pathways to care
3. Demonstrate government's actions to tackle toxic drug crisis

#### BACKGROUND:

Drug toxicity is now the leading cause of death amongst British Columbians aged 19 to 39, and the second leading cause of death overall. Since the declaration of the public health emergency in April of 2016, more than 10,000 British Columbians have died from illicit drug toxicity.

On November 1, 2021 B.C. became the first province in Canada to seek an exemption from Health Canada under subsection 56(1) of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (CDSA) for adults (18 years of age and older) in the province to possess small amounts of certain illegal substances for personal use.

On May 31, 2022, Health Canada granted B.C.'s request for an exemption, which will be in effect from January 31, 2023 to Jan. 31, 2026.

Audience research conducted in Fall 2022 showed that people living across the province were uncertain about government's investments in mental health and substance use services. This research also demonstrated that there is a desire to learn more about an overall approach, not just decriminalization.

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### STRATEGIC APPROACH

**Paid Content** - *Stop the Stigma* marketing campaign through October – November.

A SEM and SEO strategy will launch in January to address the requirement by Health Canada to inform and educate the public on the exemption and ongoing risks related to the toxic illegal drug supply. The strategy will help drive people to three government websites (listed below under owned assets).

Opportunity to layer in digital ads to drive people to the appropriate Government of BC website, including Wellbeing, to ensure people are finding accurate information about decriminalization and mental health and substance use services.

**Owned Content** – three assets available to help inform and answer questions on exemption and addictions resources (*more information in Appendix*):

1. [Gov.bc.ca/decriminalization](http://Gov.bc.ca/decriminalization) website updated with key facts and information on exemption, including exemption's scope, date it comes into effect and duration.
2. [Wellbeing.gov.bc.ca](http://Wellbeing.gov.bc.ca) will provide information on mental health and addictions resources and services in British Columbia.
3. [StopOverdose.gov.bc.ca](http://StopOverdose.gov.bc.ca) will provide people with information on stigma and advice on how to talk about addictions as a health care issue.

**Shared Content** - digital content developed for government, MLA and Minister social channels with a focus informing public on implementation of exemption and mental health and substance use services available throughout the province.

**Earned Media** – pre-implementation news release planned for early December inform public on the work underway to prepare for January 31<sup>st</sup>, scope of exemption and commitment to monitor and evaluate any unintended consequences.

A second media event and technical briefing will be planned for January 30<sup>th</sup> for federal and provincial ministers of mental health and addictions to announce implementation.

### KEY MESSAGES – OVERALL:

- Drug use is a public health matter – not a criminal justice one.
- Criminalization drives people to hide their drug use and use alone – this can be deadly
- We are decriminalizing people who use drugs to break down the barriers that prevent people from getting help.
- This is not legalization.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

- Reducing stigma around drug use is a vital part of B.C.'s work to end the toxic drug crisis and get more people the support they need.

### TARGET AUDIENCES:

- General public
  - People who may be generally supportive of the concept of decriminalization, although they may not be clear on what it means.
- People with lived experience
  - Families, caregivers and loved ones of those with lived experience
- Young people
  - Decriminalization does not apply to people under 18
- Other levels of government, stakeholders and government partners

### RECOMMENDED CAMPAIGN TACTICS:

Search Marketing

Search Engine Optimization

Wellbeing Digital Ads

### SCHEDULE:

SEO/ SEM Strategy – mid-January (TBD)

Earned media event for decriminalization (Minister's Announcement) – January 31<sup>st</sup>

Wellbeing Digital Ads – February (TBD)

### CAMPAIGN MEASUREMENT:

- TBD

### ESTIMATED COSTS:

#### *Subject to change*

All costs are estimates only. A detailed breakdown will be made available once the project and its campaign elements are complete. The actual spend will be released with Public Accounts.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Activity	Budget Estimate
<b>Total</b>	

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

### APPENDIX

Owned Channel Strategy		
Gov.bc.ca/Decriminalization		
Content	Audience	Marketing
Source of truth on behalf of provincial government related to decriminalization, including technical details such as information about which drugs are included in the exemption and how the exemption is applied in a variety settings. This page will also include links to resources for stakeholder groups such as “fact sheets”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gen pop</li> <li>▪ Stakeholders looking for specific details about the exemption</li> </ul>	Search engine optimization and marketing (SEO, SEM) to drive traffic related to decriminalization
Wellbeing.gov.bc.ca		
Content	Audience	Marketing
Content plan responsive to audience research, focused on topics such as increased drug use among youth population, “normalizing” drug use in the context of a toxic drug crisis and how to find mental health and substance use supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gen pop</li> <li>▪ Concerned parents/ caregivers</li> <li>▪ People who are at risk of toxic drug injuries or death</li> <li>▪ People looking for mental health and substance use services</li> </ul>	SEO/ SEM (searches related to increased drug use/ supply, how to stay safer, mental health and substance use services/ help-seeking), digital advertising
StopOverdoseBC.ca		
Content	Audience	Marketing
Landing page for Stop the Stigma campaign, building public awareness that addiction is a medical condition and not a choice. Resources for families and supporters to stay connected and stay informed. Integrated content related to decriminalization throughout the site, highlighted on facts carousals on landing page and throughout site in a variety of ways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gen pop</li> <li>▪ Families, caregivers</li> </ul>	Province-wide campaign (Fall 2022), SEO to drive traffic related to stigma, addiction and harm reduction (TBD)



## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

### SECTION E: Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder/ Audience	Rationale: Why targeted approach is required	Interests/concerns to be addressed	Strategy/ Channel
PWLLE / PWUD	Most impacted group in terms of criminalization and negative interactions with law enforcement	What will and won't change with the exemption (e.g. what kind of possession is protected) Voluntary nature of referrals PWLLE rights What can't be addressed through exemption (e.g. safe supply) Why police are involved in implementing decriminalization There is still risks associated with using drugs / the drug supply continues to be toxic	Informational materials delivered through treatment and harm reduction services, Health Authority websites, and peer/social service organizations.  Resource cards will be distributed by law enforcement.
Chinese community/Mandarin and Cantonese media outlets	Unique cultural attitudes toward substance use	Stigma, misinformation about	Informational materials such as news releases, website pages, social media posts will be available in traditional and simplified Chinese.
South Asian community/Punjabi media outlet	Unique cultural attitudes toward substance use	Stigma	Informational materials such as news releases, website pages and social media posts will be available in Punjabi.
Municipalities	Bylaw authority regarding public use	Harms of restricting public use Exceptions to the exemption (e.g., public transit)	Pre-conference workshop will be conducted with municipalities at UBCM.  Joint-MMHA/UBCM Local Government Decrim Working Group

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

			UBCM Compass Newsletter, which reaches every local government in BC.
Business Associations	Public use within or in vicinity of businesses	What is and isn't allowed within vicinity of businesses or on premises (e.g. washrooms)	Information available on Gov.bc.ca/decrim FAQ  Provincial engagement with BIA's (e.g., townhalls).
Youth-invested stakeholders (parents, educators)	Exemption doesn't apply to youth under 18 or on school/childcare facility premises	Exceptions for schools, childcare facilities What will and won't change for youth in possession (exemption doesn't apply) Concerns that decrim condones substance use Exemption alongside school policies Alternatives to criminal penalties	Information available on Gov.bc.ca/decriminalization  Additional strategies to be identified through engagement with BCCSU Youth Advisory Committee  Communication with school districts, such as info bulletins, regarding exceptions to the exemption and other relevant info.  s.13

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

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## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

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Metis communities	DRIPA commitments Disproportionate impact of drug toxicity crisis and incarceration on Indigenous Peoples Availability of culturally appropriate services as alternative pathways	How decriminalization will impact racism and relations with law enforcement Inclusion of Indigenous justice programs and culturally appropriate health services	One townhall complete, with follow up sessions scheduled.  Collaboration with MNBC on additional strategies for communication/engagement.
Urban Indigenous population	Exemption alongside Indigenous justice programs DRIPA commitments Disproportionate impact of drug toxicity crisis and incarceration on Indigenous Peoples Availability of culturally appropriate services as alternative pathways	How decriminalization will impact racism and relations with law enforcement Inclusion of Indigenous justice programs and culturally appropriate health services	Health Authority websites  Collaboration with FNHA and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres on additional strategies to reach urban Indigenous population
Health authority staff	Exemption alongside health authority policies regarding drug possession/consumption	How decriminalization will impact health authority policies regarding drug possession/consumption	Working groups, community of practice for HA decriminalization project managers.
Police	Primary role in implementing decriminalization Enforcement of CDSA History of negative interactions with marginalized groups Changes from de facto decriminalization that exists in some communities	Concerns that decriminalization promotes substance use Culture shift away from substance use as criminal justice issue Impacts on marginalized communities	BC to offer training programs for law enforcement on how to implement decriminalization in the months leading up to Jan. 31, 2023 and after.

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Ports of entry/border services/travellers	Exemption not applicable at borders or ports of entry (airports, seaports) Concerns around drug tourism Travellers may be unfamiliar with BC's laws and policies	Whether travellers can have drugs in these locations or transport them across borders Whether travellers are subject to the exemption once in BC (outside of ports of entry/airports)	BC to work in collaboration with Canada Border Services Agency, Transport Canada as required. Possible signage/public messaging.
Employers	Exemption alongside employer policies on drug consumption/possession	Exemption alongside employer policies on drug consumption/possession	Close collaboration with WorkSafeBC to disseminate key messages
Newcomers (immigrants, refugees, international students, temporary foreign workers)	Unfamiliar with BC's laws and policies Impact on legal status in BC	Will possession at or below the 2.5g threshold impact the legal status of these individuals even if they are not arrested and charged?	Information available on Gov.bc.ca/deccrim  Translations will also be available.
Recovery sector	Many treatment and recovery facilities have sober/"zero tolerance" policies	Exemption alongside facility policies on drug consumption/possession Whether private treatment and recovery facilities will be included in referral pathways	Existing working groups, and ongoing meeting with key stakeholders in the recovery sector.

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LGBTQ2S+ communities	LGBTQ2S+ have history of mistrust in law enforcement and unique needs regarding substance use messaging.	How decriminalization will impact discrimination against LGBTQ2S+ communities and improve health equity	Continue to work with organizations serving and representing LGBTQ2S+ communities to refine communications and strategies to reach the community with information about decriminalization.
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# COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

## Section F: Public Opinion Research

Public Opinion Research:  
Stigma Reduction Campaign and other Priority Initiatives

### Survey questions (DRAFT)

Goals:

- Assess effectiveness of *Stop the Stigma* campaign following Spring 2022 wave (May–July) and Fall 2022 wave (Oct–Nov).
- Establish baseline of how people understand BC’s exemption to decriminalize certain illicit substances (*will be revisited to assess effectiveness of communications activities*)

Audience:

- 1,500 British Columbia Adults Age 19+
- Balanced by BC age, gender, and region

### INTRODUCTION & SCREENING QUESTIONS

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This survey is about your attitudes and beliefs relating to issues that British Columbians are facing. and should take approximately 14 minutes to complete.

A1. To begin, in what year were you born?  
*Choose one.*

[DROP DOWN BOX 1931-2000]

[TERMINATE IF UNDER AGE OF 19]

A2. What is your gender identity?  
*Choose one.*

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Man  
Woman  
Non-binary  
Two Spirited  
Other term you prefer (specify)  
Prefer not to answer

A3. Which of the following best describes where you live?

*Choose one.*

[COASTAL] Vancouver

[COASTAL] North Shore (North/West Vancouver/Lion's Bay)

[FRASER] Burnaby/ New Westminster

[COASTAL] Richmond

[FRASER] North Delta/ Tsawwassen/ Ladner

[FRASER] Surrey/ White Rock

[FRASER] Langley/ Fort Langley

Coquitlam/ Port Coquitlam/ Port Moody/ Pitt Meadows/ Maple Ridge

[FRASER] **Fraser Valley** (e.g., Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Hope, Kent, Mission, etc.)

[COASTAL] **Whistler/ Squamish/ Sunshine Coast/ Central and South Coast** (e.g., Squamish, Whistler, Pemberton, Powell River, Sechelt, Bella Bella, Bella Coola, Gibsons, Ocean Falls etc.)

[ISLAND] **Vancouver Island**

[INTERIOR] **Okanagan-Similkameen/Thompson Nicola** (e.g., 100 Mile House, Armstrong, Cache Creek, Chase, Enderby, Hedley, Kamloops, Kelowna, Keremeos, Lumby, Manning Park, Merritt, Osoyoos, Oliver, Peachland, Penticton, Princeton, Salmon Arm, Sicamous, Summerland, Vernon, Williams Lake, etc.)

[INTERIOR] **Kootenays** (e.g., Castlegar, Cranbrook, Creston, Fernie, Fruitvale, Golden, Grand Forks, Invermere, Kaslo, Kimberley, Nakusp, Nelson, New Denver, Radium Hot Springs, Revelstoke, Rossland, Salmo, Sparwood, Trail, etc.)

[NORTHERN] **Northern BC** (e.g., Burns Lake, Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, Fort St. James, Fort St. John, Kitimat, Haida Gwaii, Houston, McBride, MacKenzie, New Hazelton, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Quesnel, Smithers, Stewart, Tumbler Ridge, Terrace, Valemount, Vanderhoof, etc.)



## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

### General Sentiment Questions

#### [SINGLE CHOICE]

- G1.** Overall, thinking about the way things are going these days in British Columbia, to what extent would you say that the province as a whole is on the right track, or the wrong track?

- 1 – B.C. is on the right track
- 2
- 3
- 4 – B.C. is on the wrong track

#### [SINGLE CHOICE]

- G2.** What about the current B.C. provincial government? To what extent is it on the right track or the wrong track overall?

- 1 – The B.C. Government is on the right track
- 2
- 3
- 4 – The B.C. Government is on the wrong track

- G3.** On a scale of 1 to 5 where “1” means not at all important and “5” means extremely important, how important is it to you, personally, that the BC government do each of the following things?

*Choose one for each row.*

#### [COLUMNS]

- 1 – Not at all important
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – Extremely important

#### [ROWS] [RANDOMIZE]

Reduce overdose deaths

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Responsibly manage the province's finances  
Improve elementary and secondary education  
Grow the economy and create jobs  
Protect the environment and address climate change  
Improve health care  
Make life more affordable for British Columbians  
Work towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples  
Make housing more affordable and available  
Improve access to childcare  
Make communities safer

**G4.** What would you say are the two most important issues facing British Columbia today?

*Select two from the list below.*

[RANDOMIZE]

Economy  
Jobs / unemployment  
Housing prices /affordability  
Primary care/family doctors  
Mental health supports (*new*)  
Education  
Cost of living / affordability  
Pipelines – getting them built [RANDOMIZE WITH STATEMENT BELOW]  
Pipelines – stopping new ones [RANDOMIZE WITH STATEMENT ABOVE]  
Environment / climate change / global warming  
Transportation (transit, roads and congestion)  
Taxes  
Childcare  
Poverty  
Homelessness

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- Addiction / toxic drug crisis
- Car insurance / ICBC
- Public safety / crime
- Low wages
- Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples
- Other (Specify) [ANCHOR]
- Don't know [ANCHOR]

BASIC TOXIC DRUG CRISIS AWARENESS

- B1.

How concerned are you about the impact of the toxic drug crisis (sometimes referred to as the overdose crisis) on...?

Choose one for each row.

[ROWS]

Your personal network of family and friends

Your community

The province of B.C.

[COLUMNS]

Very concerned

Somewhat concerned

Not very concerned

Not concerned at all
- B2.

How much do you agree or disagree that the B.C. Government is doing enough to address the toxic drug crisis in the province?

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Undecided

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

B3. Do you believe the following statements to be true or false?

*Choose one answer per statement.*

### [ROWS – RANDOMIZE]

1. There are a high number of deaths due to toxic drugs in B.C.
2. Illicit drugs in B.C. are more toxic than ever and are causing more deaths
3. A person will not be arrested for simple drug possession if they call 9-1-1 in case of a suspected overdose
4. People who overdose mainly do so indoors
5. The police do not arrest people for simple drug possession anymore
6. Men, especially men who work in the trades, are disproportionately impacted by the toxic drug crisis *(new)*
7. Using drugs alone is a big risk for overdose death
8. Indigenous people and people of colour are disproportionately impacted by the overdose crisis

### [COLUMNS]

I am certain it is true

I think it is true, but am not certain

I think it is false, but am not certain

I am certain it is false

B4. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about people who use drugs?

*Choose one answer per statement.*

### [ROWS – RANDOMIZE]

1. People who use drugs have made poor choices
2. People who use drugs should expect consequences for their actions
3. People should just stop using drugs if they know the drugs can kill them
4. People use drugs because they have experienced trauma or are in physical pain
5. People who use drugs are mainly homeless, poor and unemployed
6. People who use drugs could be people who live next door, people I work with, or in my family
7. People who use drugs can contribute to society in productive ways
8. People with substance use-related issues are facing a health issue
9. People who use drugs should face criminal penalties *(new)*
10. People who use drugs should be required to enter treatment/recovery *(new)*

### [COLUMNS]

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Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

ATTITUDES ABOUT HARM REDUCTION, OVERDOSE RESPONSE, AND ADDICTION TREATMENT

C1. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about harm reduction strategies, overdose responses, and addiction treatment?

*Choose one answer per statement.*

[ROWS- RANDOMIZE]

- 1. I know how to recognize the signs of an overdose
- 2. I know where to get a naloxone kit
- 3. I would call 9-1-1 if I thought I was seeing someone having an overdose in public
- 4. I know how to respond to an overdose if I encounter one
- 5. I know where to find information on overdose prevention and response
- 6. Supervised consumption services and overdose prevention services save lives
- 7. People who use drugs should have access to the same health care services as I do
- 8. I believe the government should remove criminal sanctions against people who use drugs
- 9. I believe the government should make safer (i.e., pharmaceutical grade) drugs available by prescription to people who use street drugs to help separate them from the highly toxic and unpredictable supply to reduce the risk of overdose

[COLUMNS]

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

C2. If you wanted to find information about mental health and substance use services in B.C., what would you do?

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*Select all that apply.*

1. Call 8-1-1
2. Talk to a doctor
3. Google search
4. Visit a B.C. Government website
5. Other [SPECIFY]
6. I don't know

### ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDING AROUND DECRIMINALIZATION

D0. *Lead in Q related to awareness of upcoming changes to B.C. decriminalization.... Allan to draft.*

- D1. Do you believe the following statements to be true or false as it relates to B.C.'s upcoming drug decriminalization policy?

*Choose one answer per statement.*

#### [ROWS – RANDOMIZE]

1. Decriminalization and legalization are the same thing
2. Decriminalization will not apply to youth under 18 years
3. Drug trafficking and related offences will remain illegal
4. Adults will still be prohibited from possessing illicit substances on school properties, or the property of licensed childcare facilities
5. People who use drugs will not have their drugs seized or face fines or administrative penalties. Some exceptions apply. Instead, they will be offered information about voluntary health and social supports
6. Decriminalization applies to all illicit drugs
7. Illicit drugs would be sold in regulated stores (like cannabis or alcohol)

#### [COLUMNS]

I am certain it is true

I think it is true, but am not certain

I think it is false, but am not certain

I am certain it is false

- D2. Beginning January 31, 2023, British Columbia will decriminalize the possession of small amounts of *certain* illegal drugs (opioids, cocaine, methamphetamines and MDMA) for personal use.

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Under the policy change, adults (18+) in possession of less than 2.5 grams of drugs for personal use, would not have their drugs seized, and would not be subject to arrest, charges, or fines. Some exceptions apply. Instead, individuals would be provided with information about health services available to them. Selling drugs (trafficking) will remain illegal. Drug decriminalization is one part of BC's comprehensive approach to saving lives that also includes expanding access to health care, treatment, and social services.

**How much do you agree or disagree with BC's approach to decriminalization?**

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

- D3. Which of the following statements best aligns with how you feel about charging people who possess street drugs **for their own personal use**?

**[ROWS – DO NOT RANDOMIZE]**

1. People who possess street drugs for their own personal use **should be arrested and charged with a crime.**
  2. People who possess street drugs for their own personal use **should be ticketed and fined**, but not be subject to criminal charges.
  3. People who possess street drugs for their own personal use **should not be subject to criminal charges or tickets and fines.**
- D4. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the **decriminalization** of drugs?

**[ROWS – RANDOMIZE]**

1. The fear of criminal penalties makes people hide their drug use and not reach out for help
2. Decriminalizing certain drugs will make people who use drugs do so in greater quantity or frequency
3. Decriminalization will reduce the stigma that prevents people who use drugs from seeking care and life-saving services
4. Decriminalization will make more people experiment with or use drugs for the first time
5. Decriminalization is an important step to support people and protect communities
6. Decriminalization will help people who use drugs access services and supports, like treatment and recovery or harm reduction

**[COLUMNS]**

Strongly agree

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Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

D5. Below are a series of messages related to drug decriminalization. For each message, please indicate how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement

- Addiction is a public health matter – not a criminal justice one
- Criminalization drives people to hide their drug use and often use alone. Given the increasingly toxic drug supply – using alone can be fatal
- The federal government has approved an exemption so that adults 18+ in BC will not be subject to criminal charges for possession of certain illicit drugs for personal use  
This will help break down the barriers that prevent people from getting support and create new pathways to life-saving services
- This exemption to decriminalize certain substances is not legalization. Drug trafficking and drug-related offences will remain illegal
- Reducing stigma around drug use is a vital part of B.C.'s work to build a comprehensive system of mental health and substance use care for people throughout the province

[SHOW STATEMENTS ONE AT A TIME ON SCREEN IN BOLD TEXT OF DIFFERENT COLOUR TO STAND OUT]

E1a. The message fits with what you currently believe

E1b. The message is easy to understand

E1c. The message is important to share with the BC population

E1d. The BC Government would be a credible sponsor of this message

[COLUMNS]

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree



# COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

## GCPE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- E1. Have you, or someone close to you ever been impacted by the toxic drug crisis?
- You/ yourself
  - A family member
  - A friend
  - None [EXCLUSIVE]
- E2. Have you, or someone close to you tried to access the following types of services over the past year?
- Mental health services**
- I have tried to access
  - Someone I know has tried to access
  - No
- Substance use or addiction services**
- I have tried to access
  - Someone I know has tried to access
  - No
- E3. Hypothetically, how comfortable would you be having sites built in your neighbourhood where people can access harm reduction services
- [COLUMNS]
- Very comfortable
  - Comfortable
  - Not very comfortable
  - Not at all comfortable

Stop the Stigma Campaign Effectiveness

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

F1. Where have you seen or heard information about the toxic drug crisis?

*Check all that apply.*

**[RANDOMIZE]**

- a) On billboards in public spaces
- b) On bus shelters
- c) In trains or buses
- d) On TV
- e) On the radio
- f) In the newspaper
- g) In washrooms of restaurants or bars
- h) At health centres or hospitals
- i) At colleges or universities
- j) At community organization/groups
- k) At fire stations or emergency services
- l) At government offices
- m) On Facebook
- n) On Twitter
- o) On Instagram
- p) On YouTube
- q) On B.C. Government websites
- r) On health authority websites
- s) Other social media (please list) **[ANCHOR]**
- t) Other not listed (please list) **[ANCHOR]**
- u) I have not seen any information about the overdose crisis **[ANCHOR]**

---

R0. For the next set of questions, we would like to know if you have seen or heard some ads recently. Please make sure that your volume is turned on so that you can hear the ads correctly.

R1a. Please click on the ad below when you are ready to watch. You will need to watch the full ad before continuing.

*INSERT 30s timer*

TV spot: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSpArk3M\\_Q8&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSpArk3M_Q8&t=2s)

Have you seen or heard this ad, or a shorter version of it, before today?

Yes  
No

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### [IF YES, SKIP TO R2]

- R2. We would now like you to listen to an audio ad you may have heard while listening to the radio, streaming audio or podcasts.

Please click on the ad below when you are ready to listen. You will need to listen to the full ad before continuing.

*INSERT 30s timer*

### [INSERT RADIO AD BELOW]

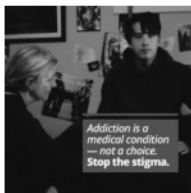
Have you heard this ad, before today?

Yes, on my phone or computer

No

I wasn't able to hear the ad

- R3. We would now like to get your thoughts on some advertising you might have seen recently. Have you seen any of these ads (or a version of these ads) before today? Please note that they may have appeared in different shapes and sizes depending on where you saw the ad.



Yes

No

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

[IF YES @R2]

R3b. Where do you remember seeing or hearing these ads?

*Please select all that apply.*

RANDOMIZE

In an online ad

On Facebook

On Instagram

On YouTube

In a sports arena

On a billboard or a bus shelter

Through friends/family

Other (please specify)

Don't know [EXCLUSIVE]

R4. After seeing or hearing these ads, how likely would you be to visit the website stopoverdose.bc.ca to learn more?

Very likely

Somewhat likely

Somewhat unlikely

Very unlikely

I don't know

DEMOGRAPHICS

Q1: Do you identify as an Indigenous person? (i.e., First Nations, Métis or Inuit)

Yes

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

No

[IF YES, ASK Q2/Q3/Q4]

[IF NO, SKIP TO X1]

Q2: Are you...

First Nations

Métis

Inuit

Q4: If you identify as a First Nations individual, do you live in a First Nations community (on-reserve)?

Yes

No

[DO NOT ASK X1 IF SAID YES @Q1]

X1. The next question refers to the ethnic origins of your ancestors, from both sides of your family. Ethnic ancestry refers to your roots or cultural background and should not be confused with citizenship or nationality. Which of the following best describes you? Choose all that apply.

[DO NOT RANDOMIZE]

First Nations/Aboriginal/Metis/Inuit

White

Black

Chinese

Other Asian (Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, etc.)

South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, etc.)

European

Latin American (Mexican, Central American, South American, etc.)

Middle Eastern (Lebanese, Iranian, Armenian, etc.)

Prefer not to answer [EXCLUSIVE]

Other (please specify) [TEXT BOX]

X2. What is the highest level of education you have completed? Choose one.

High school graduation or less

Some tradeschool

Graduated from trade school

Some college / university

University or college undergraduate degree, such as a bachelor's degree

University or college graduate degree, such as a master's or PhD

Prefer not to answer

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

- X3. Finally, for classification purposes only, which of the following ranges best describes your total annual household income before taxes?

*Choose one.*

Less than \$35,000

\$35,000 to less than \$45,000

\$45,000 to less than \$55,000

\$55,000 to less than \$65,000

\$65,000 to less than \$75,000

\$75,000 to less than \$100,000

\$100,000 to less than \$125,000

\$125,000 to less than \$150,000

\$150,000 or more

Prefer not to answer

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Withheld pursuant to/removed as

s.13 ; s.21