
STATEMENT

For Immediate Release
2024PSSG0093-001673
Dec. 19, 2024

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

Minister's statement on public drug use legislation

VICTORIA – Garry Begg, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, has released the following statement in response to the Province repealing Restricting Public Consumption of Illegal Substances Act:

“From the beginning, our goal has been to make it easier for people struggling with addiction to get the help they need. Although the number of deaths from toxic drugs this year have been slowly declining, we know there is still much more to be done to end this crisis and save lives.

“Decriminalizing the possession of a small amount of certain illegal drugs for personal use is a life-saving measure and one action the Province is taking to address the toxic-drug crisis. This must be balanced with the needs of people who want to enjoy community spaces, parks and local businesses without encountering open drug use. Decriminalization was never intended to mean people could use drugs anywhere they wished.

“The Restricting Public Consumption of Illegal Substances Act, passed in November 2023, was intended to restrict public drug use from certain areas. However, because the courts prevented it from coming into effect, it has never been brought into force.

“In response to public concerns, our government made a request to Health Canada last spring to change the decriminalization rules to ban open drug use in nearly all public places. People can now only possess drugs in private residences or designated health-care sites, such as overdose prevention, drug-checking, or addiction treatment service locations. An exception has also been made to support unhoused people in legal overnight sheltering locations.

“These changes to the decriminalization pilot restrict the use of drugs in all of the places that had been intended to be covered by the act. As a result, we are repealing this legislation.

“Our government remains determined to turn the tide on the toxic-drug crisis and we are starting to see signs of progress. If people encounter drug use in inappropriate places, police are available to enforce the rules and help to connect individuals to support services.”

A backgrounder follows.

Contact:

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BACKGROUND

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What B.C. is doing to help people struggling with addictions

- The Opioid Treatment Access (OTA) Line, launched in August 2024, is a virtual health phone service (1 833 804-8111), available seven days a week between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., that people in B.C. can call to receive same-day, same-call access to opioid agonist treatment (OAT).
- The Opioid Treatment Access Line makes it faster and easier to access life-saving medication that prevents withdrawal symptoms and reduces the risk of overdose, and to get connected to support that same day.
- In 2024, more than 200 publicly funded addiction treatment beds were created, including detox, treatment, and recovery.
- Overdose prevention services remain one of the best options for people to use drugs and to get lifesaving aid when needed.
- As of October 2024, B.C. had 43 sites that served clients with either overdose prevention or supervised consumption services in the province that month (26 of which provide clients an option for supervised smoking/inhalation of illicit drugs).
- From January 2017 until the end of October 2024, there have been approximately 5.3 million visits to overdose prevention and supervised consumption services.
- People who use drugs should always aim to have their drugs checked for free at a drug checking site, use their drugs with another person and have a naloxone kit nearby in case of an overdose.
- There are 128 sites throughout B.C. where people can access drug checking, either through an on-site device (59 sites) or via off-site testing (69 sites).
- The Lifeguard App is also available, which will dispatch emergency services to your location, if the app's alarm is not cancelled within a set timeframe after activation.

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