Harm Reduction Client Survey 2022: Knowledge of Decriminalization

The B.C. Harm Reduction Program administered a survey to its distribution site clients across BC from November 2022 to mid-January 2023. We asked participants “Did you know that British Columbia has a new decriminalization policy starting January 31, 2023? Under this policy, it is not a crime to possess small amounts of some illegal drugs for personal use.”

Who took part?

- **Communities**: 24
- **Sites**: 29
- **Participants**: 503
- **Health Authorities**: 5

Who was aware of decriminalization?

- **58%** of participants had some awareness of decriminalization before it came into effect
- **65%** of people concerned about **LOSING HOUSING** in the past six months
- **43%** of people with **NO INTERNET ACCESS**

Who was aware of decriminalization?

- **64%** of people from **VANCOUVER COASTAL**
- **61%** of people from **ISLAND HEALTH**
- **48%** of people from **NORTHERN HEALTH**
- **58%** of people from **FRASER HEALTH**
- **60%** of people from **INTERIOR HEALTH**

Details of decriminalization

- **Drugs Included Under Decriminalization**
  - Percent of participants aware of individual drugs included:
    - MDMA: 37%
    - Cocaine: 56%
    - Crack: 53%
    - Meth: 59%
    - Fentanyl/Heroin: 60%

- **Allowable Amount**
  - On average, participants estimated the allowable amount of substances was 4.9g.
  - The actual allowable amount under decriminalization is 2.5g. 44% of respondents estimated correctly

Beliefs about Decriminalization

- **54%** correctly answered that police cannot take drugs if holding less than the allowable amount
- **54%** correctly answered that people can be arrested for trafficking no matter how much drug they have on them
- **59%** answered that people can be ticketed with a bylaw violation if they use drugs in public. However, there is no correct answer as it depends on the municipality.

Sources of Decriminalization information

- Top sources of information about decriminalization were from harm reduction sites/community organizations, from friends, and health care providers.
- Ongoing education including online and local initiatives are needed to ensure the policy can equitably reduce criminalization.

Participation was limited to people who access harm reduction sites, and results are therefore not representative of all people who use substances in BC. As of 2022, this project is made possible with funding from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions.

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