

Topic	Interactions with law enforcement: Harm Reduction Client Survey 2024
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Authors	Katie Fajber, Mieke Fraser, Christie Wall, Chloé G. Xavier, Brooke Kinniburgh, Dr. Alexis Crabtree

Key messages

- In the 2024 Harm Reduction Client Survey (HRCS), 59% (330/556) of respondents had contact with law enforcement (police) at least once in the last three months. These results are the same as the 2023 HRCS (59%) and slightly higher than the 2022 HRCS (50%).
- The most reported types of police interactions (n=314) were being asked to move to another location (65%), being asked for a name or ID to check release conditions (54%) and being intimidated or harassed (51%). The response option “I was asked to move to another location” was added in the 2024 HRCS to reflect changes made to the BC Decriminalization policy in May 2024. The top responses in the 2023 HRCS were similar, except for the new response option.
- There was no substantial change in the proportion of respondents who felt they were treated with respect by law enforcement during their most recent interaction (34% in 2024, 36% in 2023, 40% in 2022).
- Overall, the type of police interactions reported by HRCS participants has not changed across the 2024, 2023, and 2022 surveys.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Title and Rights of BC First Nations who have cared for and nurtured the lands and waters for all time, including the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and sə́lilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) on whose unceded, occupied, and ancestral territory BCCDC is located — and whose relationships with the land continue to this day. As a provincial organization, we also recognize and acknowledge the inherent Title and Rights of BC First Nations whose territories stretch to every inch of the lands colonially known as “British Columbia.”

Rights Acknowledgement

We also recognize that BC is also home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people from homelands elsewhere in Canada and have distinct rights, including rights to health which are upheld in international, national, and provincial law.

Thee Eat – Truth

BCCDC is working to address the consequences of colonial policies which have had lasting effects on all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples living in the province. Consistent with the [Coast Salish teaching of Thee Eat \(truth\)](#) gifted to PHSA by Coast Salish Knowledge Keeper Siem Te'ta-in, we recognize that ongoing settler colonialism in BC undermines the inherent Title and Rights of BC First Nations and Indigenous Peoples who live in BC. The [In Plain Sight](#) report found widespread systemic racism against Indigenous people in health care; this stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice results in a range of negative impacts, harm, and even death. The data shown in this report we're sharing, reflect people who access harm reduction sites in British Columbia. In 2024, nearly half (48%) of HRCS participants self-identified as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. This reflects both the characteristics of people who use the harm reduction sites that participated in the 2024 survey as well as the ongoing and disproportionate impact of the toxic drug poisoning crisis on Indigenous and First Nations people in BC. Information provided by Indigenous respondents is included in these results but we do not present specific (stratified) results for First Nations or Métis participants. As part of BCCDC's commitment to uphold a [distinctions-based approach](#) to Indigenous data sovereignty, self-determination, and respectful use of data for all Indigenous Peoples who live in BC, data for First Nations respondents are shared with the First Nations Health Authority, and data for Métis respondents are shared with Métis Nation BC. For information on the First Nations Health Authority's approach to harm reduction and the toxic drug crisis, please see their website [FNHA Harm Reduction and the Toxic Drug Crisis](#). For information on public health surveillance indicators pertaining to Métis Peoples in BC, please see: [Taanishi kiiya? Miiyayow Métis saantii pi miyooayaan didaan - BC Métis Public Health Surveillance Program—Baseline Report, 2021](#). Currently, there is no designated organization or pathway to respectfully share Inuit-specific data in BC.

Introduction

This analysis investigates how people who use substances (PWUS) have interacted with law enforcement (police) since the start of the federal decriminalization exemption in BC. It uses responses from the 2022, 2023 and 2024 Harm Reduction Client Surveys (HRCS). The objectives are to:

- 1) Describe the types of interactions with law enforcement, including drug seizures and arrests; and
- 2) Compare interactions with law enforcement across survey years to identify potential changes and impacts.

The 2024 HRCS findings on law enforcement interactions build on previous knowledge updates from the 2022 HRCS (Xavier et al., 2023) and 2023 HRCS (Xavier et al., 2024).

More about the HRCS and evaluation of decriminalization

- Health Canada granted the province of BC an exemption to section 56.1 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) as of January 31, 2023. Specifically, this exemption decriminalized personal possession of up to 2.5 cumulative grams of opioids, methamphetamine, powder cocaine, crack cocaine, and MDMA for adults in BC. This document will refer to this exemption as decriminalization. More information about the exemption is available [here](#).
- Law enforcement in BC were required to do training as a part of the section 56 exemption laid out by Health Canada. The training was developed by law enforcement partners, health system partners and First Nations Health Authority. It was delivered in a two-phase approach:
 - Phase one was mandatory. It explained the exemption and what law enforcement could and could not do during decriminalization. For example, law enforcement personnel were not allowed to seize or arrest people for carrying less than 2.5g of decriminalized substances.
 - Phase two was encouraged but not mandatory. It had a focus on health and how PWUS can access care. It also explained the history and impacts of the drug toxicity crisis and the harms associated with criminalization.
- Changes to the exemption were made in September 2023 and May 2024 to limit where people were and were not allowed to possess personal amounts of substances. Because of this, details of the exemption were different during the 2022 (before the exemption), 2023, and 2024 cycles of the HRCS. See the [HRCS and Decriminalization-Related Policy Timeline](#) for details.
- For additional reports related to decriminalization from the 2022 and 2023 HRCS, please see the [Harm Reduction Client Survey webpage](#) and [Harm Reduction Reports](#) pages.

Study Design and Methods

- Eligible participants were 19 years or older and reported use of unregulated substances in the last six months. Responses were self-reported and anonymous. Each person was only surveyed once (a cross-sectional survey). Participants received a \$20 honorarium for completing the survey. See Appendix I for more information on survey methods.
- The 2024 HRCS includes responses from 622 eligible participants at 39 harm reduction supply distribution sites in BC.
- The 2023 HRCS includes responses from 433 eligible participants at 23 harm reduction sites, which were collected between December 2023 and March 2024.
- The 2022 HRCS includes responses from 503 eligible participants at 29 harm reduction sites across BC, which were collected between November 2022 and January 2023.
- Each year of the survey reflects a different phase of the decriminalization exemption.
 - The 2022 survey took place before the exemption started.
 - The 2023 survey took place after the policy changed to exclude places used by children.
 - The 2024 survey took place after the decriminalization exemption changed again to only apply in private residences, legal shelters, and at selected health and social service locations.

See the [HRCS and Decriminalization-Related Policy Timeline](#).

- Results from the 2022, 2023 and 2024 HRCS are presented together when the same question was asked in all three surveys. Because some questions and survey sites changed each year, it is difficult to make statistical comparisons between survey years. However, general comparisons can still offer insight into the experiences of respondents (see the limitations section for details).
- This analysis focused on survey questions about interactions with law enforcement. The questions asked and how many participants answered each question are included in table footnotes below. The denominator (representing the total number of responses to a given question) used in each analysis are different for the following reasons:
 - Some participants were not meant to answer certain questions based on answers to prior questions,
 - Responses were excluded if participants indicated the question did not apply, left the response missing or illegible, or answered unknown or prefer not to say.
 - For bi variate tables (tables comparing two questions), the denominator is limited to participants that answered both questions of interest.
 - Full technical data notes are available upon request.

- Table 1 provides information on sociodemographic and substance use characteristics of participants. A summary of statistics and association tests (Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests) are presented for 2024 respondents who responded to questions about interactions with law enforcement.
- P-values were calculated to determine whether a result was statistically significant. A statistically significant result means that the results were unlikely to happen by chance and the observed effects are real. We set the minimum threshold for statistical significance at $p < 0.005$, meaning a result with p-value of 0.005 or lower is statistically significant. This conservative threshold is used to increase our confidence that the results did not happen by chance.
- Analyses examined potential factors associated with interacting with law enforcement. Table 1 lists all the sociodemographic and substance use variables. A summary of statistics and association tests (Chi-square tests) are presented for 2024 respondents who responded to questions about interactions with law enforcement.
- Interpretation of these results were done in collaboration with the Professionals for the Ethical Engagement of Peers (PEEP), a consulting and advisory board comprised of People with Lived and Living Experience of substance use (PWLLE), to ensure appropriate contextualization of these results.

Findings

Contact with police

- In the 2024 HRCS, 59% (330/556) of respondents had contact with police at least once in the last three months. These results are the same as the 2023 HRCS (59%) and slightly higher than the 2022 HRCS (50%). In the 2024 HRCS, people aged 19-29 and 30-39, and PWUS experiencing unsheltered homelessness were more likely to have contact with police in the last three months ($p < 0.005$; see Table 1). We found significant differences in recent police contact by age in the 2022 and 2023 HRCS, and by housing status in the 2023 HRCS.

Types of police interactions

- When asked what happened when respondents had any interaction with law enforcement in the last three months, 2024 respondents commonly reported the following experiences (n=314, see Table 2a):
 - 65% were asked to move to another location;
 - 54% were asked for ID, having their name run through the system, or having their release conditions checked;
 - 51% were intimidated or harassed; and
 - 42% were asked to stop using substances in public spaces.

- In a sub-analysis comparing housing and types of police interaction, people who were unstably housed (unsheltered, staying at a shelter or in a temporary residence) were more likely to be asked to move locations or to stop using substances compared to people with housing. Among people who were unsheltered (n=145), 50% reported being asked to stop using substances in public spaces and 75% reported being asked to move locations. Comparatively, among people in a private or band-owned residence (n=28), 7% were asked to stop using substances and 29% were asked to move location. These two types of police interactions were the only types that had statistically significant variation by housing status ($P<0.005$).
- Being asked for ID or having their name run through the system was a common experience for respondents in previous surveys (48% in 2023 and 49% in 2022). Experiencing intimidation or harassment was also common (49% of 2023 HRCS respondents).
- Among 2024 HRCS respondents who had interactions with police (n=537), 34% agreed that they were treated with respect by police, 24% were neutral, but 42% disagreed. There was a very small change in the proportion of respondents in 2022, 2023 and 2024 who said they were treated with respect during their most recent encounter with police (see Table 3).

Drug seizures and arrests

- Among HRCS 2024 respondents who interacted with police in the last three months (n=314), 27% said that police took away their non-prescription or illegal drugs (Table 2a). The 2023 and 2022 HRCS results showed that police took away illegal substances at similar rates (25% and 28% respectively). Also, 11% of 2024 HRCS respondents reported that police took away their prescribed substances, which is similar to what was reported in past survey years (15% in 2023 and 9% in 2022).
- When asked if police had seized their decriminalized substances for personal use in the last three months (N=310), 32% of respondents said yes (14% said one time and 18% said multiple times; Table 4a). This specific question was new in the 2024 HRCS and was a similar to another question about police interactions which generated similar, but slightly different results (see Table 2a).
- Among 2024 HRCS respondents who said police seized their decriminalized substance for personal use and answered the question about the quantity of substance seized (N=93), 41% said it was less than 2.5g seized, 45% said it was 2.5g or more seized, and 14% were unsure (Table 4b).¹

¹ Feedback from PEEP on other parts of the HRCS has highlighted that PWUS may not know the exact quantity of substance they are carrying. This finding should be interpreted with caution.

- In 2024, 12% said they were arrested for personal possession, compared to 3% in 2023 and 12% in 2022 (Table 2a).²
- Among 2024 HRCS respondents who recently had contact with police (N=314), 36% said they were arrested. The most common reasons for getting arrested (N=112) were (Table 2b):
 - 34% personal possession;
 - 18% selling drugs or trafficking;
 - 13% theft or breaking and entering;
 - 12% having a warrant, violating their conditions of parole or a breach of probation.
- When asked if the last interaction with police started because of drug possession or use (n=288), 25% said yes, 68% said no, and 7% were unsure (Table 5). This question was new in the 2024 HRCS.

Interpretation

- **Our findings show that over half of respondents (59%) had at least one interaction with police in the last three months.** These findings are similar to past survey years: 59% reported a police encounter in the 2023 HRCS and 50% in the 2022 HRCS. Also, in both 2023 and 2024, recent police contact was significantly associated with housing status –people living in shelters or experiencing unsheltered homelessness were more likely to report police contact in the last three months compared to people living in a private or other kind of residence (see Table 1). This supports other research from BC that people with unstable housing experience more police surveillance and are more likely to interact with police (Greer et al., 2022). Other studies have shown that socially marginalized PWUS, including those with unstable housing or who are unsheltered, had contact with police more often than PWUS who have more social connection (Wood et al., 2024). Importantly, Indigenous and racialized people continue to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system (Government of Canada, 2023), showing how substance use, housing status and systemic racism can compound each other.
- **PWUS continued to face heightened surveillance from law enforcement.** One in four participants (25%) who had contact with law enforcement in the past three months said their most recent contact happened because police thought they were using or carrying substances. PWLLE noted that the answers to this question could be difficult to interpret because people may not know why the police approached

² There was variation in how this question was asked across the 2022, 2023 and 2024 HRCS. See Table 2a for full details.

them. PWLLE also noted how people who are unhoused and/or racialized are targeted by police in their communities, with substance use or possession being the way police justify starting that interaction.

- **In the 2024 HRCS, 65% of participants who had recent police contact were asked to move to another location– this was the most reported type of interaction with police.** There are many reasons people may be asked to move elsewhere, including getting complaints from businesses or neighbours, or to encourage people to move to locations where decriminalization applies. Forty-two percent of respondents were asked by police to stop using substances in public spaces. These response options were added in the 2024 survey to better understand how the most recent changes to BC decriminalization policy have impacted PWUS in BC; as of May 2024, possession or use of decriminalized substances is no longer permitted in outdoor public spaces (Government of British Columbia, 2025). It is not possible to compare this result from the 2024 survey to past years given changes to the HRCS questions each year. However, PWLLE have shared that they observed no change in the kinds of police interactions both before and since May 2024. People who were unstably housed, whether or not they were staying in a shelter, were more likely to be asked to move locations or stop using substances compared to people with housing. PWLLE emphasized that PWUS who are also experiencing homelessness are constantly being asked to move locations. This shows the need for more drop in spaces and housing as part of wraparound services for PWUS. Similar to previous HRCS, 2024 respondents commonly reported being asked for a name or ID to check release conditions (54%) and being intimidated or harassed (51%). All these findings show that PWUS, especially those experiencing homelessness and other structural inequities, continue to be criminalized.
- **About one in four respondents (27%) reported having their illegal drugs seized. These numbers are consistent to the responses from the 2022 and 2023 surveys (25% and 28%).** Furthermore, when asked if police had seized their decriminalized substance, a slightly higher number of respondents said yes (31%)³. When asked what quantity of their drugs were seized, 41% said the amount was less than 2.5g. Comparisons across HRCS years are limited due to question variability and missingness in question responses. However, in all three survey years (2022, 2023, and 2024), roughly half of respondents who had their drugs seized reported that it was under 2.5g of substance seized (Xavier et al., 2024). This is important because under the decriminalization policy, police were directed not to seize decriminalized substances under 2.5g except in specific circumstances (e.g., suspicion of trafficking, possession in child-focused spaces) (Government of British Columbia, 2025). As of May 2024, the exemption was changed

³ Note that participants were asked about drug seizures in two different questions. Fewer participants said that their drugs had been seized when answering a question about what happened when interacting with police compared to a question that directly asked if their decriminalized substances had been seized.

to specify that substances can be seized in most public places. The HRCS did not ask where substances were seized, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about how police may have exercised their discretion. Consistent with previous survey cycles, more people reported having their drugs seized than the number of people arrested for personal possession (27% versus 12%, respectively, in 2024). Other qualitative research show that drug seizures (including seizures under 2.5g) still happened after implementation of decriminalization and no study participants indicated possession charges when holding under 2.5g (Wood et al., 2024). Reports of drug seizures described by PWUS in this study suggest that some drug seizures may not always be captured in police data (Wood et al., 2024). Drug seizures without arrest also happened before decriminalization started (Hayashi et al., 2023). While HRCS data suggests that the proportion of people experiencing at least one drug seizure has not changed, police data show that the number of possession drug seizures of substances less than 2.5g have increased by 641% and the total number of drug seizures for any amount increased by 186% between August-October 2023 and August-October 2024. Even with these increases, the total number of seizures are still less than the amount of seizures before decriminalization was implemented (Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, 2025).

- **Respondents said they had police contact for many reasons and often more than one, with 36% reporting being arrested for any reason.** Arrests for drug possession (12%) or selling/trafficking (6%) were higher than in the 2023 survey but similar to the 2022 survey. These differences may be because of how the question was worded between survey years or it may be a real increase. Reporting to Health Canada shows that drug possession offences increased by 153% between August-October 2023 and August-October 2024, but are still lower than before decriminalization started (Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, 2025). Most (77%) recent possession offences happened in public spaces, highlighting the impact of the May 2024 changes which restricted locations where decriminalization applies. Since decriminalization started, PWUS have not had clear communication about the details (Greer et al., 2024), like which locations are covered by the exemption and which are not, and multiple changes to that exemption over time (see [timeline](#)). Changes made to the exemption, in combination with local bylaws that differed across municipalities, has made decriminalization increasingly complex to understand and more harmful for people at the nexus of multiple inequities, particularly those with unstable housing (Ali et al., 2024).
- **Less than half of HRCS respondents said they were treated with respect by police across survey years** (34% in 2024; 36% in 2023; 40% in 2022). PWUS, especially those who are socially marginalized, have shared that they fear police and do not trust them. This distrust stems from a long history of negative interactions with police (Wood et al., 2024). One concern about how decriminalization in BC was developed and started is that it relies on police discretion for policy enforcement and for connecting people with health and social services – potentially leading to more, rather than less, encounters between police and PWUS (Michaud et al., 2024).

- **BC decriminalized small amounts of certain substances using a model which relied on police discretion.** The BC Government launched training on the decriminalization policy in September 2023 to provide background on the rationale behind decriminalization and support police decision-making when operationalizing the exemption. After the new exemption in May 2024, the BC Government wrote a document that was intended to update police agencies on what remains illegal under decriminalization and provide details on the operationalization of the amendment in the context of problematic drug use. Another qualitative study emphasized how ongoing tensions between PWUS and police, reflect a long history of punitive practice, and how differences in police discretion and police interactions varied across BC (Russell et al., 2025). This highlights the need to improve and mandate training, and re-evaluate the dual roles police play in enforcing law and connecting people to health services (Russell et al., 2025).
- **Overall, PWUS continue to report having recent interactions with police since decriminalization started and many of them did not lead to an arrest for possession or selling drugs.** The HRCS is one tool for gathering perspectives and experiences of PWUS and is best used together with other sources of information, including qualitative and administrative data from a diverse group of PWUS. Ongoing evaluation and monitoring of decriminalization is needed alongside strategies to address underlying causes of the toxic drug crisis (J. C. Xavier et al., 2024).

Limitations

- Participants in the 2024 HRCS are a convenience sample of clients who visited a participating harm reduction supply distribution site in BC. These results are not generalizable to the experience of all people who use harm reduction services or to all PWUS in BC and their diverse experiences interactions with law enforcement.
- Results from this survey are impacted by selection bias because participants were selected from people accessing a participating harm reduction site and who agreed to complete the survey. As such our results may not be a fair representation of all PWUS.
- Participants in the HRCS are anonymous and different site locations may participate each year. It is not possible to know if participants are the same in the 2022, 2023, and 2024 survey. This limits the ability to do statistical tests and compare results from different years. Comparisons of results from different survey years should be interpreted with caution.
- Although results from the HRCS provide some insights into the experiences of PWUS during decriminalization, they must be interpreted alongside other quantitative and qualitative sources of information to fully understand the impacts of decriminalization. These results reflect the views of people who accessed harm reduction sites during the survey period, but not all PWUS visit these sites. They are a part of a broader evaluation of decriminalization.

- Survey responses are self-reported, and the accuracy of responses cannot be assessed. Many sites had someone available to support people to complete the survey; however, the presence of a support person may have affected how respondents answered. BCCDC continues to look for new ways to support individuals completing the survey and help them provide honest responses that can be used to improve services and supports for people who use harm reduction services.
- Consistent with BCCDC policies to reduce the risk of participants being identified, subgroup results are only presented when there are at least 20 respondents.
- Survey questions varied across the 2022, 2023 and 2024 HRCS in attempt to improve data quality each year and reflect emerging issues. Because of these changes, it's difficult to compare some questions between years.
- The question about what occurred during interactions with law enforcement included any police contact in the last three months and may represent multiple interactions per person. The survey did not ask respondents how many times they interacted with police in the last three months. Furthermore, caution is required when interpreting the quantity of decriminalized drugs seized. During consultations with PEEP, members emphasized that PWUS generally do not weigh their substances, and responses may be inaccurate.

Citations

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Supporting Information

Document citation

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Data steward(s) disclaimer

All inferences, opinions, and conclusions drawn in this Knowledge Update are those of the authors, and do not reflect the opinions or policies of the Data Steward(s).

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents who interacted with police in the last 3 months compared to respondents who did not. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2024.

Characteristic	Overall, N=556	Interacted with Police		P-Value
		Yes, N = 330	No, N = 226	
Health authority	556			0.039
Interior	139	95 (68%)	44 (32%)	
Fraser	137	86 (63%)	51 (37%)	
Vancouver Coastal	89	45 (51%)	44 (49%)	
Island	97	53 (55%)	44 (45%)	
Northern	94	51 (54%)	43 (46%)	
Community size (2021 Census Population Centre)	556			0.9
Large Urban Population Centre	265	160 (60%)	105 (40%)	
Medium Population Centre	108	62 (57%)	46 (43%)	
Small Population Centre	183	108 (59%)	75 (41%)	
Type of current residence §	532			<0.001*
Private or band owned residence	71	29 (41%)	42 (59%)	
In a temporary or transitional residence	137	63 (46%)	74 (54%)	
Shelter	104	63 (61%)	41 (39%)	
Unsheltered homeless	205	151 (74%)	54 (26%)	
Age group	553			<0.001*
19 to 29	58	41 (71%)	17 (29%)	
30 to 39	164	112 (68%)	52 (32%)	
40 to 49	176	108 (61%)	68 (39%)	
50 or older	155	66 (43%)	89 (57%)	
Gender ^	551			0.4
Man	349	215 (62%)	134 (38%)	
Woman	195	108 (55%)	87 (45%)	
Sexual orientation	539			0.8
Heterosexual or straight	454	270 (59%)	184 (41%)	
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual/Pansexual, Queer, Asexual, Unsure/questioning	85	49 (58%)	36 (42%)	
Employment and volunteer work	529			0.5
Yes (full or part time)	84	53 (63%)	31 (37%)	
No	445	260 (58%)	185 (42%)	
Frequency of substance use (last 30 days)	541			0.066
Every day	454	278 (61%)	176 (39%)	
A few times a week	60	32 (53%)	28 (47%)	
A few times a month or less	27	11 (41%)	16 (59%)	

Characteristic	Overall, N=556	Interacted with Police		P-Value
		Yes, N = 330	No, N = 226	
Frequency of using substances alone (last 30 days)	513			0.2
Every day	298	190 (64%)	108 (36%)	
A few times a week	123	70 (57%)	53 (43%)	
A few times a month	52	26 (50%)	26 (50%)	
Did not use substances alone	40	23 (58%)	17 (43%)	
Recent opioid and stimulant use (last 3 days)	556			0.002*
Opioid only	66	35 (53%)	31 (47%)	
Stimulant only	109	61 (56%)	48 (44%)	
Opioid and stimulant	252	171 (68%)	81 (32%)	
No recent opioid or stimulant use	129	63 (49%)	66 (51%)	
Injected any substance (last 6 months)	544			0.005*
Yes	218	147 (67%)	71 (33%)	
No	326	179 (55%)	147 (45%)	
Smoked/inhaled any substance (last 6 months)	545			0.3
Yes	518	313 (60%)	205 (40%)	
No	27	13 (48%)	14 (52%)	
Used substances at an OPS/SCS (last 6 months)	527			0.4
Yes	353	215 (61%)	138 (39%)	
No	174	99 (57%)	75 (43%)	

*p<0.005

§ 'Temporary or transitional residence' includes hotels/motels, rooming houses, single room occupancy (SRO), social/supportive housing. 'Unsheltered homeless' includes houseless, couch surf, tent, encampment, in a vehicle, no fixed address. 'Other' category not shown due to low count (fewer than 20 respondents).

^Nonbinary / Gender expansive response not shown due to low count (fewer than 20 respondents).

Table 2a. Details of police interactions in the last 3 months among respondents with recent law enforcement encounter. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Characteristic	2024 HRCS, N=314 *	2023 HRCS, N=233	2022 HRCS, N=235
I was asked if I was okay / police did a wellness or health check	127 (40%)	70 (30%)	59 (25%)
I was provided with information about health or harm reduction services	46 (15%)	32 (14%)	18 (8%)
I was asked to stop using substances in public spaces	133 (42%)	-	-
I was asked to move to another location	204 (65%)	-	-
I was asked for my ID / name was run through the system or checked release conditions	169 (54%)	113 (48%)	116 (49%)
I had my rigs, pipes, or harm reduction supplies taken away §	80 (25%)	60 (26%)	72 (31%)
I had my prescribed substances taken away	33 (11%)	36 (15%)	22 (9%)
I had my non-prescription or illegal substances taken away	86 (27%)	59 (25%)	65 (28%)
I was intimidated or harassed verbally, physically or sexually ^	159 (51%)	115 (49%)	-
I was intimidated or harassed verbally	154 (49%)	-	-
I was harassed physically or sexually	71 (23%)	-	-
I was put in jail or a sobering cell	103 (33%)	-	-
I was arrested for any reason **	112 (36%)	74 (32%)	94 (40%)
I was arrested for drug possession	38 (12%)	7 (3%)	27 (12%)
I was arrested for selling drugs/trafficking	20 (6%)	-	-
I was arrested for something else	89 (28%)	-	-

* Total survey sample is 622 respondents. Of the 330 respondents that had police contact in the last 3 months, only 314 are included in the denominator above (missing: 16/330, 4.8%).

§ In 2022 and 2023, the response option indicated having rigs or pipes taken away. In 2024, the response option indicated having rigs, pipes or harm reduction supplies taken away.

^ The response option “Intimidated or harassed verbally, physically” was added for 2023 as it was a common free-text response in 2022. In 2024, separate response options for “intimated or harassed verbally” and “intimidated of harassed physically or sexually” were provided. In this analysis, those response options have been regrouped for comparability. There is variation in the response options provided across years.

** In 2022, there were three response options about arrests: arrested for personal possession, arrested for selling drugs, or arrested for other reasons. In 2023, respondents were asked if they were arrested and to specify the reason for arrest in a free text response. In 2024, the three response options from 2022 were provided with the addition of a free text response to describe other reasons.

Table 2b. Reasons for arrest* among respondents who were arrested at least once in the last 3 months and among respondents who interacted with police in the last 3 months. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2023 and 2024.

Reasons for arrest*	2024 HRCS		2023 HRCS	
	Respondents reporting an arrest, N=112	Respondents with recent police contact, N=330	Respondents reporting an arrest, N=74	Respondents with recent police contact, N=233
Drug possession	38 (34%)	38 (12%)	7 (9%)	7 (3%)
Selling drugs/trafficking	20 (18%)	20 (6%)	3 (4%)	3 (1%)
Assault	11 (10%)	11 (3%)	13 (18%)	13 (6%)
Theft / breaking and entering	15 (13%)	15 (5%)	9 (12%)	9 (4%)
Minor offense or bylaw	8 (7%)	8 (2%)	NA	NA
No perceived reason	1 (1%)	1 (0%)	8 (11%)	8 (3%)
Public disturbance / intoxication	4 (4%)	4 (1%)	5 (7%)	5 (2%)
Warrant / violation of conditions / breach of probation	13 (12%)	13 (4%)	17 (23%)	17 (7%)
Other	4 (4%)	4 (1%)	8 (11%)	8 (3%)
Reason for arrest missing	9 (8%)	10 (3%)	15 (20%)	15 (7%)

* In 2023, reason for arrest derived using free-text responses. In 2024, there was a response option for “I was arrested for drug possession” and “I was arrested for selling drugs/trafficking” and all other reasons were derived using free-text responses. Derived responses in 2023 were used to clean the 2024 free-text options. In 2024, one more derived response was added for “minor offense or bylaw” (e.g., jay walking, noise complaint, littering). These cells should be interpreted with caution. In 2022, there were three response options about arrests: arrested for personal possession, arrested for selling drugs, or arrested for other reasons. There was no write-in option to further specify reasons; therefore, data from 2022 are not shown above.

Table 3. Treatment with respect during last police interaction. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2022, 2023, and 2024.

The last time I interacted with police I was treated with respect*	2024 HRCS, N=537	2023 HRCS, N=320	2022 HRCS, N=464
Agree	182 (34%)	116 (36%)	186 (40%)
Neutral	128 (24%)	63 (20%)	91 (20%)
Disagree	227 (42%)	141 (44%)	187 (40%)

* Excludes respondents who said they never had contact with police (i.e., selected “does not apply”).

Table 4a. Reported seizure of personal amounts of decriminalized drugs (opioids/down, crack, powder cocaine, meth, MDMA or ecstasy) in the last 3 months among respondents with contact with police. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2024.

Had personal decriminalized substances seized by police (last 3 months)	N=310 *
Yes	97 (31%)
Yes, one time	42 (14%)
Yes, multiple times	55 (18%)
No	208 (67%)
Don't know	5 (2%)

* Total survey sample is 622 respondents. Of the 330 respondents that had police contact in the last 3 months, only 310 are included in the denominator above (missing: 20/330, 6.1%).

Table 4b. Quantity of decriminalized drugs seized among respondents who had drugs taken by police in the last 3 months. Ham Reduction Client Survey 2024 §.

Quantity seized	2024 respondents, N=93*
Less than 2.5g	38 (41%)
2.5g or more	42 (45%)
Unsure	13 (14%)

* Total survey sample is 622 respondents. Of the 97 respondents that had police contact and had drugs seized in the last 3 months, only 93 are included in the denominator above (missing: 4/97, 4.1%). Quantity seized may be inaccurate as drugs are not often weighed.
§ 2022 and 2023 HRCS results are not shown here due to variation in how the survey question was asked across years and a high level of missingness in the data.

Table 5. Last interaction with police starting because of use or possession of drugs among respondents with contact with police in the last 3 months. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2024.

Last police interaction started due to use or possession of drugs	N=288 *
Yes	71 (25%)
No	197 (68%)
Don't know	20 (7%)

* Total survey sample is 622 respondents. Of the 330 respondents that had police contact in the last 3 months, only 288 are included in the denominator above (missing: 42/330, 12.7%).

Appendix I – Methods

Additional details about the methods used for collecting and analysing 2024 Harm Reduction Site Client Survey data:

- The 2024 HRCS is a quantitative survey about substance use, barriers to accessing prescribed alternatives to the toxic supply, BC's decriminalization policy, experiences with overdose, and interactions with law enforcement. Questions about social and demographic characteristics of respondents were also asked.
- Harm reduction supply distribution sites across BC invited to participate were chosen based on where they are located in the province, whether they had enough resources to participate, and if there was interest from the site and its clients. Surveys were distributed at 39 harm reduction distribution sites in small, medium, and large population centres across the five regional health authorities (Interior: 11 sites, Fraser: 10 sites, Vancouver Coastal: five sites, Island: six sites, Northern: seven sites). Each participating site completed between 10 and 30 surveys.
- People were eligible to participate in the survey if they:
 - Were 19 years of age or older and
 - Used a drug that is illegal or from the unregulated market (e.g., opioids/down, heroin, fentanyl, powder cocaine, crack cocaine, methamphetamine, hallucinogens, etc.) in the past six months.
- BCCDC received 628 completed surveys. We excluded six ineligible surveys, resulting in a total of 622 eligible surveys.
- BCCDC shares additional information with sites to help individuals understand and respond to questions. BCCDC recommends that site staff assist respondents to complete the survey, but this was not possible in all locations.
- Respondents received a \$20 cash honorarium for their time to complete the survey. Sites were provided with five dollars per participant to cover any small costs for administering the survey (e.g., snacks, pens).
- The 2024 HRCS survey was implemented as a paper and a digital survey. Participants complete the survey at a participating harm reduction site.
- The 2023 HRCS was implemented as a paper survey only. The 2023 survey followed the same inclusion criteria of 2024. 2023 HRCS includes responses from 433 eligible respondents at 23 harm reduction supply distribution sites in BC. Eligible respondents were 19 years or older and reported use of unregulated substances in the last six months. Responses were self-reported and anonymous. Each person was only surveyed once (a cross-sectional survey). Responses were collected between

December 5, 2023 and March 8, 2024 (*after* implementation of decriminalization). Participants received a \$20 honorarium for completing the survey.

- The 2022 HRCS was implemented as a paper survey only. The 2022 survey followed the same inclusion criteria of 2024. Respondents in the 2022 survey could also participate if they received opioid agonist treatment or prescribed alternatives in the past six months. The 2022 survey was given out at 29 harm reduction sites across BC between November 2022 and January 2023. A total of 503 eligible surveys were completed. Sites were selected from across BC (Interior: seven sites, Fraser: six sites, Vancouver Coastal: four sites, Island: six sites, Northern: six sites). Participants received a \$15 honorarium to complete the survey.
- For more HRCS resources see the [Harm Reduction Client Survey](#) webpage and [Harm Reduction Reports pages](#).