



May 31, 2022

BC Request for Federal Exemption to Decriminalize Personal Possession Granted

NNPBC was extremely happy to hear the [announcement](#) that the request made by the province for a federal exemption from the Government of Canada to decriminalize personal possession of drugs under section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act has been granted. This important first step will come into effect as of January 31, 2023 when adults will no longer be arrested or charged for possession of certain illicit drugs under 2.5 grams for personal use.

NNPBC has been a strong supporter of decriminalization of illicit drugs for personal use and endorsed the request made last year to move the province in this direction. For over six years a toxic drug supply has claimed the lives of thousands of British Columbians. According to the BC Coroners Service Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths in BC report, 2021 was the deadliest year on record with 2224 lives lost to this crisis. Nurses who work in our communities have seen the devastating ramifications of the current toxic drug crisis and have seen first-hand the negative impact that criminalization has had on people and communities. Moreover, evidence shows that decriminalization is a critical step that removes barriers to support and reduces stigma.

NNPBC continues to support a multi-faceted harm reduction approach including safe supply, the wide use and distribution of naloxone kits, supervised consumption sites, overdose prevention sites, increased funding for community action, greater access to treatment for those who seek it, and decriminalization recognizing that the criminalization of drug involved lifestyles significantly contributes to risk of overdose.

Nursing is well positioned to raise concerns and provide education about the necessary training for law enforcement, as well as utilize existing opportunities within Provincial Policing Regulation to redirect police resources toward community-based and evidence-based health and social programs. Indeed, nursing's reputation as one of the world's most trusted health professions is based on its long history of working with the most vulnerable populations, often in times of crisis. Additionally, nurses have a responsibility to protect and advocate for at risk populations and help ensure that law enforcement officials are supported by nursing professionals when applicable.

By focusing on and mitigating the harms caused by current drug laws, we have an opportunity to continue working towards a society that does not punish those who use illicit drugs, but rather promotes health and well-being and values a just and equitable society for individuals and populations.

Resources

- [NNPBC Overdose Crisis Resources](#)
- [Issues Summary: Federal Bill C-216](#)
- [The Overdose and Toxic Drug Crisis 2021](#)
- [BC Request for Federal Exemption to Decriminalize Personal Possession](#)
- [Issues Brief: Bill C-22](#)
- [Issues Brief: Safe Supply](#)
- [Position Statement: Improving Access to Diacetylmorphine](#)
- [Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of British Columbia \(NNPBC\) and the Harm Reduction Nurses Association \(HRNA\) call for the decriminalization of people who use drugs in B.C.](#)