

Open letter regarding the proposed “Vancouver Model” of decriminalization

To: Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health
British Columbia Decriminalization Working Group
City of Vancouver Decriminalization Working Group

As a coalition of organizations representing victims and survivors of the decades-long war on drugs, we are demanding immediate action from all levels of government to halt and redraft the so-called “Vancouver Model” of decriminalization ahead of the City of Vancouver’s proposed final submission to Health Canada on May 14, 2021.

If the “Vancouver Model” is not stopped now, the City of Vancouver and Health Canada will set a deadly precedent for public policy; not only in Vancouver, but across Canada and beyond. We reiterate why this current proposal for decriminalization must be scrapped immediately:

- 1. Drug users were excluded from the development of the model.** Mayor Kennedy Stewart broke his commitment to work with drug users in the design of the “Vancouver Model” of decriminalization. By excluding the very people most impacted by the drug war from the drafting of drug policy, the model stands to reproduce the harm of prohibition and the exclusion of drug users from civic life;
- 2. The VPD have had unchecked decision-making power over the development of the model.** The police are the perpetrators of the drug war; the goal of decriminalization must be to curb their power and impunity over our community. The City and Health Canada have willingly handed complete jurisdiction over the “Vancouver Model” to the VPD instead of those who stand to benefit most from decriminalization – drug users;
- 3. The model’s proposed threshold amounts are unrealistic and dangerously low.** As people who use drugs every day, we assure you that the thresholds proposed in the City of Vancouver’s April 12 submission to Health Canada are unrepresentative of lived patterns of possession. By setting decriminalization thresholds at this low level, the City of Vancouver will further expose drug users to police profiling and brutalization;
- 4. The model does not feature meaningful provisions for safe supply.** Without an effort to provide a regulated supply of drugs, decriminalization will not reduce overdose deaths. It is of the utmost importance that the “Vancouver Model” include provisions for harm-reduction-focused supply.

We cannot abide by the phony “Vancouver Model” of decriminalization and refuse to be tokenized in petty political bids. We call on the City to immediately amend its proposed thresholds and call on Health Canada to ensure that any approved thresholds are consistent with the goals of reducing harms to people who use drugs. And finally, we demand the VPD to be removed from their decision-making capacity in the decriminalization process.

If these changes are not made, we, the undersigned, will have no choice but to condemn this model as harmful and uninformed. We want decriminalization – but on our terms, not the terms of the police and politicians. Our lives are at stake.

Signed,

Organizations

BC Centre on Substance Use

Coalition of Peers Dismantling the Drug War

Crackdown Podcast

Defund 604 Network

Drug User Liberation Front

Moms Stop the Harm

Nanaimo Area Network of Drug Users

Pacific Aids Network

PIVOT Legal Society

Rural Empowered Drug Users Network

Surrey–Newton Union of Drug Users

Tenant Overdose Response Organizers

Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users

Vancouver Prison Justice Day Committee

Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society

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