



DECRIMINALIZATION OF SMALL AMOUNTS OF DRUGS IN BC A POSITIVE STEP – BUT FALLS SHORT OF CHANGES NEEDED TO SAVE LIVES

June 1, 2022
For immediate release

(Vancouver, BC) The British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW) welcomes the decriminalization of small amounts of illicit substances in principle but warns that the change does not go far enough to have the intended outcome of reducing stigma and saving lives.

As federation Partners of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), BCASW has long supported the [decriminalization of the personal use of substances](#) to advance a public health approach to drug policy.

“Though we are so pleased the federal government has granted this exemption, it falls sorely short of what is needed,” said BCASW President, Michael Crawford. “As it stands, this change is not enough -- it’s our hope that discussion on the exemption limit continues and that a higher, more practical limit is set quickly: the federal government cannot afford to be performative when it comes to people’s lives.”

In their application, the province asked for an exemption for 4.5 grams of illicit substances. This was based on extensive research and consultation with those with lived experience of substance use, who determined that this was an acceptable – though still very conservative – small supply for personal use over a few days. The federal government’s exemption has allowed for only 2.5 grams.

“The federal government is demonstrating they are ready to listen to the evidence on decriminalization – so why not listen to the evidence when it comes to the details?” added Crawford. “Now is the time to listen to experts, and, most importantly, the voices of lived and living experience.”

This announcement comes at an interesting time for Canada, as [Bill C-216](#), a Private Member’s Bill that would federally decriminalize small amounts of drugs and bring forth other public health approaches to drug policy, is set to be debated in the House of Commons today.

“We strongly support Bill C-216 because it would affirm what experts, advocates, and those with lived experience of substance all know to be true: substance use is a health issue, and if we keep treating it like a criminal issue, we will never solve the opioid crisis and save lives,” said CASW President, Joan Davis-Whelan. “We are hopeful Members of Parliament will see this as the non-partisan, health issue that it is, and quickly pass the Bill to the Committee stage.”

Beyond the strong positive step of decriminalization, other resources are also needed to not only save lives, but foster dignity, health, and safety for all. Any change to criminalization must be accompanied by

more robust supports: an increased safe supply and additional treatment and recovery spaces are profoundly necessary.

“There is no one silver bullet to solve the opioid crisis – it’s going to take a combination of elements working in concert – but decriminalization is an incredibly important one,” concluded Crawford, “we are hopeful this step in BC is the first of many.”

-30-

Michael Crawford | President
BC Association of Social Workers
E: michaeldavidcrawford@outlook.com
C: 250.682.1132

The BC Association of Social Workers is a voluntary, not-for-profit membership association that supports and promotes the profession of social work and advocates for social justice.

We acknowledge that our office is in the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and that our members live and work in unceded territories across British Columbia.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers ([CASW](#)) is the national professional association for social work in Canada.

CASW is located in Ottawa on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.