

ELECTION 2019

# Public Health Matters

CPHA is encouraging voters to question their local candidates on some key public health issues. We have an opportunity to challenge all candidates to set a higher standard for Canadians. We should not be satisfied with rehearsed answers that lack depth. We need to hold the candidates themselves to a higher standard and expect more from them.

## Decriminalization of personal use of psychoactive substances

Canada needs a federal government that is committed to sustained investment in public health across the country. CPHA calls on the next federal government to invest in strategies and programs that support strong healthy people in Canada regardless of their economic and social status.

### A HIGHER STANDARD FOR CANADIAN FAMILIES

The use of illegal psychoactive substances (IPS) in Canada persists despite ongoing efforts to limit their consumption. Criminalization of those who use these substances remains the principal tool to control their use and is unsuccessful.

**It's time for Canada to do better.**

### CALL TO ACTION

CPHA is calling on the next federal government to work with provinces and territories to:

- Decriminalize the possession of small quantities of currently illegal psychoactive substances for personal use and provide summary conviction sentencing alternatives, including the use of absolute and conditional discharges;
- Decriminalize the sales and trafficking of small quantities of IPS by young offenders using legal provisions similar to those noted above;
- Develop probationary procedures and provide a range of enforcement alternatives, including a broader range of treatment options, for those in contravention of the revised drug law;
- Develop the available harm reduction and health promotion infrastructure such that all those who wish to seek treatment can have ready access;
- Provide amnesty for those previously convicted of possession of small quantities of illegal psychoactive substances; and
- Provide expanded evidence-informed harm reduction options that include, for example, improved access to supervised consumption facilities and drug purity testing services.

#PublicHealthMatters



CANADIAN  
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The Voice of Public Health

## WHY IT MATTERS

In Canada, [a 2017 survey](#) showed that over 13% of all adults, 19% of youth aged 15 to 19, and 33% of young adults aged 20 to 24 had used cannabis during the past year, while 3% of the population admitted to past-year use of at least one of five illegal drugs (cocaine or crack, ecstasy, speed or methamphetamines, hallucinogens or heroin). This amount represents an increase from 2% of the population in 2015, and was a result of an increased use of cocaine. This survey also noted that 22% of youth aged 15 to 19 reported using psychoactive pharma drugs (opioid pain relievers, stimulants, and/or tranquilizers and sedatives), as did 21% of those aged 20 to 24 years and 23% of those older than 25 years. Of this cadre 5% reported problematic use. [The overall cost of substance use in Canada](#) was estimated to be \$38.4 billion in 2014 with approximately \$8.8 billion associated with the use of opioids, cocaine, other central nervous system (CNS) depressants, other CNS stimulants and other substances. The use of illegal psychoactive substances is becoming increasingly problematic as demonstrated by the current opioid crisis, the availability of increasingly harmful synthetic products, and the expanding misuse of prescription pharmaceuticals.

These ongoing challenges demonstrate that criminalization does not reduce the likelihood of illegal psychoactive substance use, and often results in stigmatization and other harms to those caught in possession of small amounts of substances for personal use.

The alternative to criminalization is a public health approach that seeks to maintain and improve the health of populations based on the principles of social justice, attention to human rights and equity, evidence-informed policy and practice, and addressing the underlying determinants of health. Such an approach places health promotion, health protection, population health surveillance, and the prevention of death, injury and disability as the central tenets of all related initiatives. These actions are based on evidence of what works or shows signs of working, and are organized, comprehensive and multi-sectoral. This approach finds its basis in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as several United Nations (UN) agreements.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

1. Do you support the decriminalization of the possession of small quantities of currently illegal psychoactive substances?
2. If elected, will your party amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize the possession of small quantities of currently illegal psychoactive substances for personal use and provide summary conviction sentencing alternatives, including the use of absolute and conditional discharges?
3. Will your party further develop the available harm reduction and health promotion infrastructure such that all those who wish to seek treatment can have ready access?

## RESOURCES

- [CPHA Position Statement: Decriminalization of Personal Use of Psychoactive Substances](#)

## ABOUT CPHA

Founded in 1910, the Canadian Public Health Association is the independent voice for public health in Canada with links to the international community. As the only Canadian non-governmental organization focused exclusively on public health, we are uniquely positioned to advise decision-makers about public health system reform and to guide initiatives to help safeguard the personal and community health of Canadians and people around the world. We are a national, independent, not-for-profit, voluntary association. Our members believe in universal and equitable access to the basic conditions which are necessary to achieve health for all.