

Topic	Awareness and knowledge of decriminalization among people who use substances: Harm Reduction Client Survey 2023
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Key messages

- Awareness of BC’s decriminalization policy has increased among survey participants in 2023, a year after it came into effect. Awareness increased from 61% of respondents in 2022 to 88% in 2023.
- Respondents in 2023 had a better general understanding of what is allowed under decriminalization compared to respondents in 2022, before decriminalization came into effect. People’s increase in understanding varied on the specific details about decriminalization, including whether law enforcement can take away drugs that weigh below the possession threshold (2.5g) on school grounds, what is considered a breach of substance-related court conditions, and under what circumstances can individuals be arrested for trafficking.
- Since decriminalization came into effect January 31, 2023, the policy has already been updated. To ensure that the policy can equitably reduce criminalization, people who use substances (PWUS) need timely communication and educational materials to understand the current scope of decriminalization.
- People who use substances need many opportunities to learn about the details of decriminalization that happen in different formats and in different locations. Community organizations that support PWUS (e.g., harm reduction sites, overdose consumption sites, and supervised consumption sites) may play an important role in ongoing education efforts.
- The results presented here represent the perspectives of respondents in the 2022 and 2023 Harm Reduction Client Surveys. While these results cannot be generalized to the experiences of all PWUS in BC, they may be generalizable to PWUS who access harm reduction supply distribution sites.

Introduction

The first aim of this analysis was to describe awareness and knowledge of BC's decriminalization policy among Harm Reduction Client Survey (HRCS) respondents in 2023, a year after the policy came into effect. Second, to compare awareness of the policy and understanding of what actions law enforcement can take under decriminalization between 2022 (before implementation) and 2023 (after implementation).

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](#) (Government of British Columbia, 2024a). More information about the exemption and the province's monitoring and evaluation activities is available [here](#). Data collection for the 2022 HRCS occurred before implementation of decriminalization and data collection for the 2023 HRCS occurred after the September 8, 2023 amendment came into effect. Please see [this document](#) for a timeline of the HRCS and the decriminalization exemption.
- For additional reports related to decriminalization from the 2022 and 2023 Harm Reduction Client Survey (HRCS), please see the [Harm Reduction Client Survey webpage](#) and [Harm Reduction Reports pages](#).

Study Design and Methods

- The 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. Survey responses were self-reported, anonymous, cross-sectional, and collected between December 5, 2023 and March 8, 2024 (*after* implementation of decriminalization). Respondents received a \$20 honorarium for completing the survey. The 2022 HRCS includes responses from 503 eligible respondents at 29 harm reduction sites across BC. Data were collected between November 2022 and January 2023 (*before* implementation of decriminalization). See the Appendix for more information on survey methods.
- Results from the 2022 and 2023 HRCS are presented together when the same question was asked in both surveys. Statistical comparisons between 2022 and 2023 results cannot be done, but general comparisons can offer insight into the experiences of respondents (see the limitations section for details).

- Analyses examined potential factors associated with awareness of decriminalization. Table 1 describes the full list of sociodemographic and substance use variables. A summary of statistics and association tests (Chi-square and Fisher’s exact tests) are presented for 2023 respondents who responded to questions about awareness of decriminalization.
- P-values were calculated to determine whether a result was statistically significant or not. 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.
- Interpretation of these results were done in collaboration with the Professionals for the Ethical Engagement of Peers, a consulting and advisory board comprised of People with lived and living experience of substance use (PWLLE), to ensure appropriate contextualization of these results.

Results

Awareness of decriminalization policy

- In 2023, over 89% (355/401) of respondents had some awareness of decriminalization a year after it came into effect. In 2022, only 61% of respondents (290/474) were aware of the decriminalization policy in the months before it came into effect. Awareness of decriminalization increased for respondents from all sociodemographic groups.
- In 2023, awareness was highest among those who participated at sites in Vancouver Coastal Health (92%), sites in large urban population centres (91%), had full- or part-time employment (95% and 98%, respectively), used drugs alone a few times a week (92%), had contact with police in the last 3 months (91%), were 19-29 years old (94%), or identified as men (91%), although none of these results are statistically significant at $p < 0.005$. Awareness of decriminalization was lower among women (83%), individuals aged 30-39 (86%), individuals who did not use drugs alone in the last 30 days (82%), or individuals participating at sites in Northern Health (84%). Differences in awareness were not statistically significant at $p < 0.005$ (Table 1).

Understanding of what actions law enforcement can take under decriminalization

- Respondents had a better understanding of what actions are allowed under decriminalization in 2023 compared to 2022. For each true or false statement, over 64% of respondents correctly answered in 2023 compared to 53% in 2022 (Table 2a).

- Among respondents aware of decriminalization, 80% knew that individuals can have their drugs confiscated if they are holding any amount on school grounds (Table 2b). Survey respondents from Fraser Health (89%), from large urban population centres (85%), or who used drugs at an overdose prevention site (OPS) in the last 30 days (84%) were more likely to know the correct answer; however, these differences are not statistically significant at $p < 0.005$.
- Nearly 64% of respondents who were aware of decriminalization knew that police could charge individuals with a breach of substance-related release conditions, no matter how much an individual was holding (Table 2c). A larger proportion of survey respondents from sites in Vancouver Coastal Health (73%), who live in supportive housing or SRO, hotel/motels (71%), who used substances every day in the last 30 days (67%), who used drugs at an OPS in the last 30 days (71%), or who used stimulants in the last 3 days (70%) knew the correct answer; however, these differences are not statistically significant at $p < 0.005$.
- Seventy-one percent of respondents aware of decriminalization knew that individuals can be arrested for trafficking no matter how much drug they have on them—selling drugs in any quantity remains illegal under decriminalization (Table 2c). A larger proportion of survey respondents from Fraser Health (79%), from sites in large urban populations centres (74%), aged 19-29 (79%), with full-time employment (80%), who used drugs at an OPS in the last 30 days (75%), who used drugs everyday in the last 30 days (75%), or who had contact with police in the last 3 months (75%) knew the correct answer; however, these differences are not statistically significant at $p < 0.005$. In comparison, only 53% of respondents correctly responded in 2022.

Interpretation

- **Awareness about decriminalization has increased, however there are still gaps in knowledge about specific details of the policy.** Prior to decriminalization coming into effect, over half of participants had some awareness of the policy. A year after implementation, 88% of respondents knew about the policy. In addition, respondents had a greater understanding of the specific details of what is legal allowed and what is illegal under decriminalization. However, knowledge gaps still exist as 12% of participants said they did not know about the policy (7% of survey participants did not answer the question). Among those who were aware of decriminalization, many did not know specific details about the policy. Even among respondents who had contact with police in the last three months, 29% didn't know you can still be charged with breaching release conditions. Awareness increased among respondents from all sociodemographic groups, but awareness did not differ significantly by participant characteristics.

- **Improved communication and education are needed to increase awareness among all individuals who use substances, especially because the policy has changed since it came into effect** (see Introduction). Even after a full year of the exemption being in effect, one in ten respondents did not know about the exemption, and of those who did, many did not know the details did and how they applied (e.g., possession on school property, trafficking, breach of conditions). PWUS need to receive regular communication to ensure they are aware of changes to the decriminalization policy, such as the prohibition of possession within 15 metres of child-focused play spaces (effective September 18, 2023) and prohibition of possession in most public spaces (effective May 7, 2024). Previous research showed that peer workers and existing peer networks are effective for sharing information because they are well connected and a trusted source of information (Greer et al, 2023). Government and non-government partners need to broadly communicate changes to the scope of the exemption through multiple channels that reaches all PWUS.
- **The benefits of decriminalization depend on how much affected groups are aware and understand the policy.** Using multiple and diverse communication approaches is best so all PWUS, especially for those without regular internet access and who rely on social networks and community organizations for information, to be informed of accurate information about decriminalization (Loewen *et al*, 2023). In addition, education about the details of the policy and the rights of PWUS under the policy should be an ongoing part of qualitative and quantitative work in this area and considered in the evaluation of decriminalization moving forward.

Limitations

- Respondents in the 2023 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 people who use substances (PWUS) in BC and their diverse experiences of awareness and knowledge of decriminalization.
- Respondents in the HRCS are anonymous, thus it is not possible to determine if participants are the same in the 2022 and 2023 survey. This limits the ability to do statistical tests. Comparisons between results from the 2023 and 2022 HRCS presented in this knowledge update should be interpreted with caution.
- Although results from the HRCS provide some insights into the experiences of PWUS during the first year of decriminalization, these results must be interpreted alongside other quantitative and qualitative sources of information to evaluate the impacts of decriminalization. These results reflect

the perspectives of people who accessed harm reduction sites at the time of data collection, but not all PWUS visit harm reduction supply distribution sites. This report summarizes experiences of people who access harm reduction sites, as part of the broader evaluation of decriminalization. Some questions asked in the 2022 survey were modified for the 2023 survey so responses may not be directly comparable.

- 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 people 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 survey respondents being identified, subgroup results are only presented when there are at least 20 respondents.

Supporting Information

Acknowledgements

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Document citation

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Characteristics of people who were and were not aware of the decriminalization policy. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2022 and 2023.

Characteristic	2023				2022			
	Overall, N = 401	Aware of decriminalization, N = 355	Not aware of decriminalization, N = 46	p-value	Overall, N = 474	Aware of decriminalization, N = 290	Not aware of decriminalization, N = 184	p-value
Total participants	433	355 (82%)	46 (11%)		503	290 (58%)	184 (42%)	
Question respondents	401	355 (88%)	46 (12%)		474	290 (61%)	184 (39%)	
Health Authority (survey site)	401			0.4	474			0.2
Interior	61	56 (92%)	5 (8%)		130	83 (64%)	47 (36%)	
Fraser	81	72 (89%)	9 (11%)		98	59 (60%)	39 (40%)	
Vancouver Coastal	71	65 (92%)	6 (8%)		47	34 (72%)	13 (28%)	
Island	85	76 (89%)	9 (11%)		102	63 (62%)	39 (38%)	
Northern	103	86 (83%)	17 (17%)		97	51 (53%)	46 (47%)	
Community size (2021 census population centre)	401			0.4	474			0.12
Small population centre (1,000 to 29,999)	173	149 (86%)	24 (14%)		164	92 (56%)	72 (44%)	
Medium population centre (30,000 to 99,999)	48	43 (90%)	5 (10%)		150	101 (67%)	49 (33%)	
Large urban population centre (100,000 or more)	180	163 (91%)	17 (9%)		160	97 (61%)	63 (39%)	
Type of current residence	375			0.8	452			0.8
Private or band owned residence	79	69 (87%)	10 (13%)		113	71 (63%)	42 (37%)	
Another residence (e.g., hotel/motel, SRO, supportive housing)	106	95 (90%)	11 (10%)		109	63 (58%)	46 (42%)	
Shelter	73	66 (90%)	7 (10%)		90	56 (62%)	34 (38%)	
No regular place to stay (homeless, tent, couch-surf)	117	101 (86%)	16 (14%)		140	88 (63%)	52 (37%)	
Age group	389			0.5	463			0.4
19 to 29	31	29 (94%)	2 (6%)		71	38 (54%)	33 (46%)	
30 to 39	113	97 (86%)	16 (14%)		147	90 (61%)	57 (39%)	
40 to 49	130	114 (88%)	16 (12%)		122	80 (66%)	42 (34%)	
50 or older	115	105 (91%)	10 (9%)		123	76 (62%)	47 (38%)	
Gender	394			0.019	445			0.054
Man	247	225 (91%)	22 (9%)		273	177 (65%)	96 (35%)	
Woman	133	110 (83%)	23 (17%)		172	95 (55%)	77 (45%)	

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Characteristic	2023				2022			
	Overall, N = 401	Aware of decriminalization, N = 355	Not aware of decriminalization, N = 46	p-value	Overall, N = 474	Aware of decriminalization, N = 290	Not aware of decriminalization, N = 184	p-value
Sexual orientation	378			0.4	438			0.6
Heterosexual or straight	313	275 (88%)	38 (12%)		388	238 (61%)	150 (39%)	
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual / Pansexual, Queer, Asexual, Unsure/questioning	65	60 (92%)	5 (8%)		50	33 (66%)	17 (34%)	
Employment	381			0.018	454			0.013
Full time (at least 30 hours a week)	21	20 (95%)	1 (5%)		21	18 (86%)	3 (14%)	
Part time (less than 30 hours a week)	58	57 (98%)	1 (2%)		82	56 (68%)	26 (32%)	
No employment	302	260 (86%)	42 (14%)		351	203 (58%)	148 (42%)	
Frequency of substance use in the last 30 days	388			0.9	451			0.3
Every day	311	277 (89%)	34 (11%)		318	186 (58%)	132 (42%)	
A few times a week	45	41 (91%)	4 (9%)		77	50 (65%)	27 (35%)	
A few times a month or less	32	28 (88%)	4 (12%)		56	38 (68%)	18 (32%)	
Injection drug use, last 6 months	383			>0.9	462			0.1
Yes	181	161 (89%)	20 (11%)		179	119 (66%)	60 (34%)	
No	202	178 (88%)	24 (12%)		283	165 (58%)	118 (42%)	
Inhalation drug use, last 6 months	386			0.7	459			0.8
Yes	350	314 (90%)	36 (10%)		406	248 (61%)	158 (39%)	
No	36	31 (86%)	5 (14%)		53	31 (58%)	22 (42%)	
Drug use at overdose prevention site (OPS) / supervised consumption site (SCS), last 6 months	381			0.5	466			0.3
Yes	247	221 (89%)	26 (11%)		228	146 (64%)	82 (36%)	
No	134	116 (87%)	18 (13%)		238	140 (59%)	98 (41%)	
Used opioids in last 3 days (fentanyl, heroin)	401			>0.9	474			0.3
Yes	258	229 (89%)	29 (11%)		285	168 (59%)	117 (41%)	
No	143	126 (88%)	17 (12%)		189	122 (65%)	67 (35%)	

Characteristic	2023				2022			
	Overall, N = 401	Aware of decriminalization, N = 355	Not aware of decriminalization, N = 46	p-value	Overall, N = 474	Aware of decriminalization, N = 290	Not aware of decriminalization, N = 184	p-value
Used stimulants in last 3 days (meth, coke, crack)	401			0.013	474			0.1
Yes	285	260 (91%)	25 (9%)		307	179 (58%)	128 (42%)	
No	116	95 (82%)	21 (18%)		167	111 (66%)	56 (34%)	
Frequency of using drugs alone in the last 30 days	369			0.5	.	.	.	.
Every day	194	172 (89%)	22 (11%)		.	.	.	.
A few times a week	95	87 (92%)	8 (8%)		.	.	.	.
A few times a month	47	41 (87%)	6 (13%)		.	.	.	.
Did not use drugs alone	33	27 (82%)	6 (18%)					
Had contact with police in last 3 months	374			0.4	453			>0.9
Yes	224	204 (91%)	20 (9%)		227	138 (61%)	89 (39%)	
No	150	132 (88%)	18 (12%)		226	139 (62%)	87 (38%)	

n (%)

Pearson's Chi-squared test; Fisher's exact test
 In 2023, question response options included yes or no. In 2022, question response options included: yes, no, or not sure. Results are only shown for participants who answered yes or no for each survey year. Frequency of using drugs alone in the last 30 days was not asked in 2022.

Table 2a. Responses to True and False questions about decriminalization policy. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2023.

Response	People can have their drugs confiscated/taken away if they are holding any amount of drugs on school grounds N = 351	People can be arrested for drug trafficking/dealing, no matter how much drug they are selling or trading N = 352	Police can charge you with breach of substance-related release conditions, no matter how much you are holding N = 348
Respondents			
True	280 (80%)	250 (71%)	222 (64%)
False	41 (12%)	60 (17%)	66 (19%)
Not sure	30 (9%)	42 (12%)	60 (17%)
n (%)			
* Correct answer to each question is true			

Table 2b. Responses to T/F statement*, “People can have their drugs confiscated/taken away if they are holding any amount of drugs on school grounds. among participants aware of decriminalization. Stratified by respondent characteristics. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2023.

Characteristic	N	True, N = 280	False, N = 41	Not sure, N = 30	p-value
Question respondents		280 (80%)	41 (12%)	30 (9%)	
Health Authority (survey site)	351				0.3
Interior		42 (76%)	7 (13%)	6 (11%)	
Fraser		64 (89%)	7 (10%)	1 (1%)	
Vancouver Coastal		52 (81%)	8 (12%)	4 (6%)	
Island		56 (74%)	9 (12%)	11 (14%)	
Northern		66 (79%)	10 (12%)	8 (10%)	
Community size (2021 Census Population Centre)	351				0.2
Small population centre (1,000 to 29,999)		111 (76%)	23 (16%)	13 (9%)	
Medium population centre (30,000 to 99,999)		31 (74%)	6 (14%)	5 (12%)	
Large urban population centre (100,000 or more)		138 (85%)	12 (7%)	12 (7%)	
Type of current residence	327				0.8
Private or band owned residence		55 (80%)	8 (12%)	6 (9%)	
Another residence (e.g., hotel/motel, SRO, supportive housing)		77 (81%)	10 (11%)	8 (8%)	
Shelter		52 (81%)	10 (16%)	2 (3%)	
No regular place to stay (homeless, tent, couch-surf)		79 (80%)	11 (11%)	9 (9%)	
Age group	341				0.5
19 to 29		21 (75%)	6 (21%)	1 (4%)	
30 to 39		76 (80%)	12 (13%)	7 (7%)	
40 to 49		94 (83%)	10 (9%)	9 (8%)	
50 or older		82 (78%)	11 (10%)	12 (11%)	
Gender	345				0.4
Man		175 (79%)	28 (13%)	19 (9%)	
Woman		85 (78%)	13 (12%)	11 (10%)	
Sexual orientation	332				0.6
Heterosexual or straight		217 (80%)	34 (12%)	21 (8%)	
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual/Pansexual, Queer, Asexual, Unsure/questioning		49 (82%)	5 (8%)	6 (10%)	
Employment	334				0.7
Full time (at least 30 hours a week)		15 (75%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	
Part time (less than 30 hours a week)		48 (84%)	6 (11%)	3 (5%)	
No employment		205 (80%)	31 (12%)	21 (8%)	
Frequency of substance use in the last 30 days	342				0.2
Every day		223 (81%)	30 (11%)	21 (8%)	
A few times a week		28 (68%)	8 (20%)	5 (12%)	
A few times a month or less		20 (74%)	3 (11%)	4 (15%)	

Characteristic	N	True, N = 280	False, N = 41	Not sure, N = 30	p-value
Injection drug use, last 6 months	335				0.4
Yes		125 (79%)	17 (11%)	17 (11%)	
No		143 (81%)	21 (12%)	12 (7%)	
Inhalation drug use, last 6 months	342				0.2
Yes		250 (80%)	36 (12%)	25 (8%)	
No		24 (77%)	2 (6%)	5 (16%)	
Drug use at overdose prevention site (OPS)/ supervised consumption site (SCS), last 6 months	334				0.064
Yes		184 (84%)	20 (9%)	16 (7%)	
No		83 (73%)	17 (15%)	14 (12%)	
Used opioids in last 3 days (fentanyl, heroin)	351				0.8
Yes		183 (81%)	25 (11%)	18 (8%)	
No		97 (78%)	16 (13%)	12 (10%)	
Used stimulants in last 3 days (meth, coke, crack)	351				0.7
Yes		204 (79%)	32 (12%)	21 (8%)	
No		76 (81%)	9 (10%)	9 (10%)	
Frequency of using drugs alone in the last 30 days	323				0.7
Every day		133 (78%)	23 (13%)	15 (9%)	
A few times a week		70 (82%)	6 (7%)	9 (11%)	
A few times a month		33 (80%)	4 (10%)	4 (10%)	
Did not use drugs alone		23 (88%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	
Had contact with police in last 3 months	332				0.079
Yes		168 (84%)	20 (10%)	12 (6%)	
No		98 (74%)	19 (14%)	15 (11%)	
n (%)					
Pearson's Chi-squared test; Fisher's exact test					
* Correct answer is true					

Table 2c. Responses to T/F statement*, “Police can charge you with breach of substance-related release conditions, no matter how much you are holding” among participants aware of decriminalization. Stratified by respondent characteristics. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2023.

Characteristic	N	True, N = 222	False, N = 66	Not sure, N = 60	p-value
Question respondents		222 (64%)	66 (19%)	60 (17%)	
Health Authority (survey site)	348				0.1
Interior	53	25 (47%)	15 (28%)	13 (25%)	
Fraser	71	50 (70%)	8 (11%)	13 (18%)	
Vancouver Coastal	64	47 (73%)	8 (12%)	9 (14%)	
Island	75	49 (65%)	15 (20%)	11 (15%)	
Northern	85	51 (60%)	20 (24%)	14 (16%)	
Community size (2021 Census Population Centre)	348				0.3
Small population centre (1,000 to 29,999)	147	87 (59%)	32 (22%)	28 (19%)	
Medium population centre (30,000 to 99,999)	40	25 (62%)	10 (25%)	5 (12%)	
Large urban population centre (100,000 or more)	161	110 (68%)	24 (15%)	27 (17%)	
Type of current residence	327				0.009
Private or band owned residence	69	33 (48%)	15 (22%)	21 (30%)	
Another residence (e.g., hotel/motel, SRO, supportive housing)	95	67 (71%)	17 (18%)	11 (12%)	
Shelter	66	44 (67%)	15 (23%)	7 (11%)	
No regular place to stay (homeless, tent, couch-surf)	97	67 (69%)	18 (19%)	12 (12%)	
Age group	339				0.7
19 to 29	28	16 (57%)	7 (25%)	5 (18%)	
30 to 39	94	64 (68%)	18 (19%)	12 (13%)	
40 to 49	113	74 (65%)	18 (16%)	21 (19%)	
50 or older	104	62 (60%)	23 (22%)	19 (18%)	
Gender	342				>0.9
Man	220	141 (64%)	40 (18%)	39 (18%)	
Woman	108	66 (61%)	23 (21%)	19 (18%)	
Sexual orientation	329				0.2
Heterosexual or straight	269	177 (66%)	53 (20%)	39 (14%)	
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual/Pansexual, Queer, Asexual, Unsure/questioning	60	36 (60%)	10 (17%)	14 (23%)	
Employment	331				0.066
Full time (at least 30 hours a week)	20	9 (45%)	3 (15%)	8 (40%)	
Part time (less than 30 hours a week)	56	38 (68%)	9 (16%)	9 (16%)	
No employment	255	167 (65%)	50 (20%)	38 (15%)	

Characteristic	N	True, N = 222	False, N = 66	Not sure, N = 60	p-value
Frequency of substance use in the last 30 days	339				0.002
Every day	271	182 (67%)	50 (18%)	39 (14%)	
A few times a week	40	24 (60%)	9 (22%)	7 (18%)	
A few times a month or less	28	9 (32%)	7 (25%)	12 (43%)	
Injection drug use, last 6 months	332				>0.9
Yes	159	100 (63%)	30 (19%)	29 (18%)	
No	173	110 (64%)	34 (20%)	29 (17%)	
Inhalation drug use, last 6 months	340				0.016
Yes	309	201 (65%)	61 (20%)	47 (15%)	
No	31	16 (52%)	4 (13%)	11 (35%)	
Drug use at overdose prevention site (OPS)/ supervised consumption site (SCS), last 6 months	332				0.003
Yes	218	154 (71%)	35 (16%)	29 (13%)	
No	114	59 (52%)	29 (25%)	26 (23%)	
Used opioids in last 3 days (fentanyl, heroin)	348				0.4
Yes	222	143 (64%)	45 (20%)	34 (15%)	
No	126	79 (63%)	21 (17%)	26 (21%)	
Used stimulants in last 3 days (meth, coke, crack)	348				<0.001
Yes	255	178 (70%)	38 (15%)	39 (15%)	
No	93	44 (47%)	28 (30%)	21 (23%)	
Frequency of using drugs alone in the last 30 days	321				0.3
Every day	168	117 (70%)	28 (17%)	23 (14%)	
A few times a week	86	47 (55%)	20 (23%)	19 (22%)	
A few times a month	41	26 (63%)	6 (15%)	9 (22%)	
Did not use drugs alone	26	15 (58%)	6 (23%)	5 (19%)	
Had contact with police in last 3 months	331				0.011
Yes	200	142 (71%)	29 (14%)	29 (14%)	
No	131	73 (56%)	34 (26%)	24 (18%)	
n (%)					
Pearson's Chi-squared test; Fisher's exact test					
* Correct answer is true					

Table 2d. Responses to statement*, “People can be arrested for drug trafficking/dealing, no matter how much drug they are selling or trading” among participants aware of decriminalization. Stratified by respondent characteristics. Harm Reduction Client Survey 2022 and 2023.

Characteristic	2023					2022						
	N	Overall, N = 352	True, N = 250	False, N = 60	Not sure, N = 42	p-value	N	Overall, N = 282	True, N = 152	False, N = 67	Not sure, N = 63	p-value
Question Respondents	352		250 (71%)	60 (17%)	42 (12%)		282		152 (54%)	67(24%)	63(22%)	
Health Authority (survey site)	352					0.5	282					0.3
Interior		55	37 (67%)	12 (22%)	6 (11%)			80	35 (44%)	21 (26%)	24 (30%)	
Fraser		72	57 (79%)	9 (12%)	6 (8%)			58	36 (62%)	13 (22%)	9 (16%)	
Vancouver Coastal		65	50 (77%)	10 (15%)	5 (8%)			34	19 (56%)	10 (29%)	5 (15%)	
Island		75	50 (67%)	12 (16%)	13 (17%)			63	36 (57%)	15 (24%)	12 (19%)	
Northern		85	56 (66%)	17 (20%)	12 (14%)			47	26 (55%)	8 (17%)	13 (28%)	
Community size (2021 Census Population Centre)	352					0.5	282					<0.001
Small population centre (1,000 to 29,999)		148	103 (70%)	29 (20%)	16 (11%)			89	42 (47%)	27 (30%)	20 (22%)	
Medium population centre (30,000 to 99,999)		41	26 (63%)	8 (20%)	7 (17%)			96	51 (53%)	13 (14%)	32 (33%)	
Large urban population centre (>=100,000)		163	121 (74%)	23 (14%)	19 (12%)			97	59 (61%)	27 (28%)	11 (11%)	
Type of current residence	329					0.7	271					0.7
Private or band owned residence		69	49 (71%)	9 (13%)	11 (16%)			70	40 (57%)	17 (24%)	13 (19%)	
Another residence (e.g., hotel/motel, SRO, supportive housing)		95	71 (75%)	15 (16%)	9 (9%)			62	34 (55%)	14 (23%)	14 (23%)	
Shelter		65	46 (71%)	11 (17%)	8 (12%)			54	32 (59%)	11 (20%)	11 (20%)	
No regular place to stay (homeless, tent, couch-surf)		100	70 (70%)	21 (21%)	9 (9%)			85	40 (47%)	20 (24%)	25 (29%)	
Age group	342					0.6	276					0.7
19 to 29		28	22 (79%)	3 (11%)	3 (11%)			37	17 (46%)	10 (27%)	10 (27%)	
30 to 39		95	67 (71%)	19 (20%)	9 (9%)			87	46 (53%)	25 (29%)	16 (18%)	
40 to 49		114	81 (71%)	21 (18%)	12 (11%)			77	46 (60%)	14 (18%)	17 (22%)	
50 or older		105	73 (70%)	15 (14%)	17 (16%)			75	42 (56%)	18 (24%)	15 (20%)	
Gender	346					>0.9	264					0.022
Man		222	155 (70%)	40 (18%)	27 (12%)			172	96 (56%)	47 (27%)	29 (17%)	
Woman		110	80 (73%)	17 (15%)	13 (12%)			92	44 (48%)	19 (21%)	29 (32%)	

BCCDC | Awareness and knowledge of decriminalization among people who use substances: Harm Reduction Client Survey 2023

Characteristic	2023					2022						
	N	Overall, N = 352	True, N = 250	False, N = 60	Not sure, N = 42	p-value	N	Overall, N = 282	True, N = 152	False, N = 67	Not sure, N = 63	p-value
Sexual orientation	332					0.04	264					0.7
Heterosexual or straight		272	194 (71%)	51 (19%)	27 (10%)			231	123 (53%)	58 (25%)	50 (22%)	
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual/Pansexual, Queer, Asexual, Unsure/questioning		60	42 (70%)	6 (10%)	12 (20%)			33	19 (58%)	9 (27%)	5 (15%)	
Employment	335					0.8	270					0.8
Full time (at least 30 hours a week)		20	16 (80%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)			18	11 (61%)	4 (22%)	3 (17%)	
Part time (less than 30 hours a week)		56	42 (75%)	9 (16%)	5 (9%)			56	30 (54%)	16 (29%)	10 (18%)	
No employment		259	182 (70%)	45 (17%)	32 (12%)			196	107 (55%)	44 (22%)	45 (23%)	
Frequency of substance use in the last 30 days	343					0.2	267					0.6
Every day		276	199 (72%)	50 (18%)	27 (10%)			181	100 (55%)	39 (22%)	42 (23%)	
A few times a week		40	28 (70%)	6 (15%)	6 (15%)			49	27 (55%)	12 (24%)	10 (20%)	
A few times a month or less		27	16 (59%)	4 (15%)	7 (26%)			37	20 (54%)	12 (32%)	5 (14%)	
Injection drug use, last 6 months	336					>0.9	276					0.11
Yes		160	112 (70%)	28 (18%)	20 (12%)			117	71 (61%)	21 (18%)	25 (21%)	
No		176	122 (69%)	32 (18%)	22 (12%)			159	80 (50%)	45 (28%)	34 (21%)	
Inhalation drug use, last 6 months	344					0.3	272					0.6
Yes		313	219 (70%)	57 (18%)	37 (12%)			243	136 (56%)	57 (23%)	50 (21%)	
No		31	25 (81%)	2 (6%)	4 (13%)			29	14 (48%)	7 (24%)	8 (28%)	
Drug use at overdose prevention site (OPS)/ supervised consumption site (SCS), last 6 months	335					0.12	278					0.3
Yes		220	165 (75%)	32 (15%)	23 (10%)			141	83 (59%)	29 (21%)	29 (21%)	
No		115	74 (64%)	25 (22%)	16 (14%)			137	68 (50%)	35 (26%)	34 (25%)	
Used opioids in last 3 days (fentanyl, heroin)	352					0.8	282					0.6
Yes		227	160 (70%)	41 (18%)	26 (11%)			164	92 (56%)	36 (22%)	36 (22%)	
No		125	90 (72%)	19 (15%)	16 (13%)			118	60 (51%)	31 (26%)	27 (23%)	

BCCDC | Awareness and knowledge of decriminalization among people who use substances: Harm Reduction Client Survey 2023

Characteristic	2023					2022						
	N	Overall, N = 352	True, N = 250	False, N = 60	Not sure, N = 42	p-value	N	Overall, N = 282	True, N = 152	False, N = 67	Not sure, N = 63	p-value
Used stimulants in last 3 days (meth, coke, crack)	352					0.6	282					0.6
Yes		258	186 (72%)	44 (17%)	28 (11%)			175	92 (53%)	45 (26%)	38 (22%)	
No		94	64 (68%)	16 (17%)	14 (15%)			107	60 (56%)	22 (21%)	25 (23%)	
Frequency of using drugs alone in the last 30 days	325					0.2						
Every day		171	129 (75%)	29 (17%)	13 (8%)			.	.	.	.
A few times a week		86	54 (63%)	17 (20%)	15 (17%)			.	.	.	.
A few times a month		41	29 (71%)	5 (12%)	7 (17%)			.	.	.	.
Did not use drugs alone		27	18 (67%)	6 (22%)	3 (11%)			.	.	.	.
Had contact with police in last 3 months	333					0.089	271					0.8
Yes		202	151 (75%)	34 (17%)	17 (8%)			135	76 (56%)	32 (24%)	27 (20%)	
No		131	87 (66%)	23 (18%)	21 (16%)			136	73 (54%)	32 (24%)	31 (23%)	
n (%)												
Pearson's Chi-squared test; Fisher's exact test. Frequency of using drugs alone in the last 30 days was not asked in 2022. * Correct answer is true												

Appendix I - Methods

Additional details about the methods used for completing and analysing 2023 Harm Reduction Site Client Survey data:

- The 2023 HRCS included questions on 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 survey respondents were also included.
- Harm reduction supply distribution sites across BC were invited to participate based on geographical representation, site capacity, and interest of the site and its clients. Quantitative surveys were distributed at 23 harm reduction distribution sites in small, medium, and large population centres across the five regional health authorities (Interior: 4 sites, Fraser: 4 sites, Vancouver Coastal: 5 sites, Island: 4 sites, Northern: 6 sites). Each participating site completed between 10 and 30 surveys.
- People are eligible to participate in the survey if they:
 - Are 19 years of age or older and
 - Used a drug that is illegal or from the unregulated market (for example: opioids/down, heroin, fentanyl, powder cocaine, crack cocaine, methamphetamine, hallucinogens, etc.) in the previous six months.
- BCCDC received 447 completed surveys. We excluded fourteen ineligible surveys, resulting in a total of 433 eligible surveys.
- The HRCS is a paper survey, and 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 do the survey. Sites were provided with \$5 per participant to cover any small costs for administering the survey (e.g., snacks, pens).
- The 2022 HRCS was implemented following similar methods. The 2022 survey followed the same inclusion criteria of 2023. Respondents in the 2022 survey could also participate if they received opioid agonist treatment or prescribed alternatives in the previous six months. The 2022 survey was distributed at 29 harm reduction sites across BC between November 2022 and January 2023; 503 eligible surveys were completed. Sites were selected from across British Columbia (Interior: 7 sites, Fraser: 6 sites, Vancouver Coastal: 4 sites, Island: 6 sites, Northern: 6 sites). Participants received a stipend of \$15 to participate in the survey.
- For more HRCS reports and outputs see the [Harm Reduction Client Survey webpage](#) and [Harm Reduction Reports pages](#).