

soared.ⁱ The needle exchanges and the Vancouver drug injection sites have become “honey-pots” or meeting points for drug users and dealers since these locations are “no-go” areas for police. This has resulted in the demise of businesses in the area because of the increase of drug related crime. Currently there are more than three dozen European cities, such as Berlin, Stockholm, London, and Oslo, that have signed a declaration against injection sites because they have learned from bitter experience that such “solutions” lead to increased problems for the community.



A Positive Drug Policy for Canada

Sweden has had remarkable success with curtailing illicit drug use by employing a programme of compulsory drug treatment for addicts. As a result, according to the 2006 report of the UN Office of Drugs and Crime,ⁱⁱ Sweden has among Europe’s lowest crime, disease, medical and social problems stemming from drug addiction.

In this regard, Canada should establish more drug courts (currently, they are available in Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Regina) to ensure that addicts undergo treatment and rehabilitation as an alternative to a conviction and court record. The drug courts allow the offence to be suspended if the offender agrees to take treatment and be monitored through regular urinalysis and counselling. Those who complete the program drug free receive a suspended sentence or a conditional discharge. Those who fail are required to return to the regular court system for sentencing.

It is also important that many more detox and treatment centres be established in order to accommodate the real needs of drug addicts in Canada.

ⁱ Mangham C. *A Critique of Canada’s INSITE Injection Site and its Parent Philosophy: Implications and Recommendations for Policy Planning* Journal of Global Drug Policy and Practice, 1, (2), 2007.

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ⁱⁱ United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, “Sweden’s Successful Drug Policy”: A review of the Evidence, 2006, Geneva ODC.

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REAL WOMEN OF CANADA

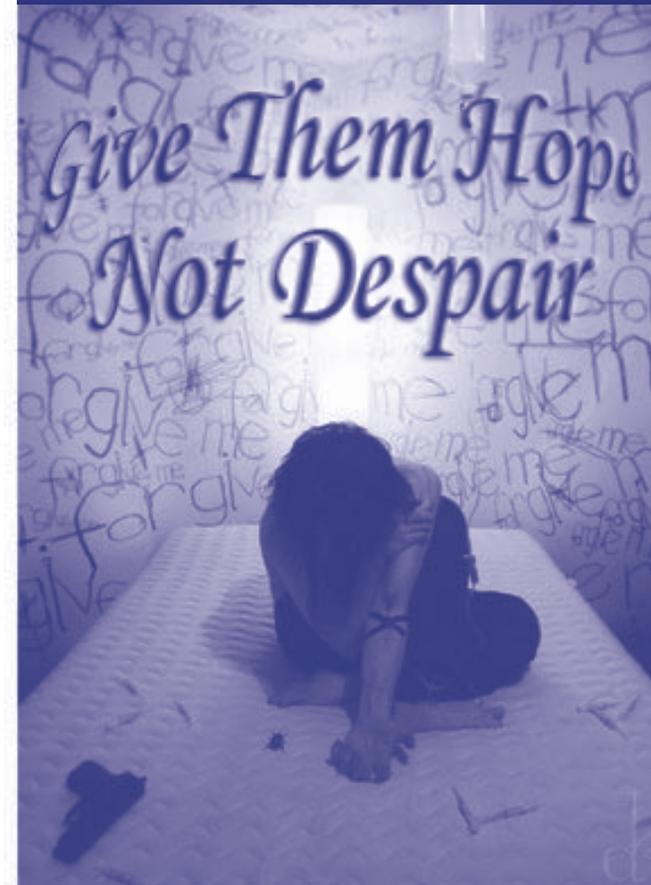
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REAL WOMEN OF CANADA



ILLEGAL DRUG USE IN CANADA



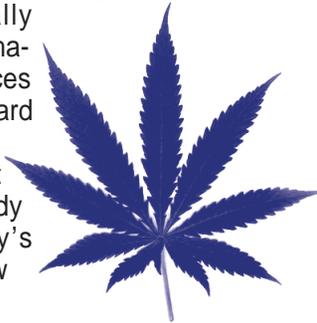
Illegal Drug Use In Canada

Canada's policy on drugs, established in 1992, calls for a balanced approach to both their supply and the reduction of demand for them. The policy provides for:

1. enforcement by the police;
2. prevention through education; and
3. treatment and rehabilitation of addicts.

This policy is in accordance with the three UN treaties on drugs which Canada ratified and which require the prohibition of illicit drug use.

In 2001, federal Auditor-General Sheila Fraser reviewed Canada's drug policy and found that there was a fundamental failure of leadership and coordination in implementing the policy. She specifically referred to sparse information and lack of resources and enforcement in regard to upholding the policy. She also noted that there had been a steady decline in this policy's funding over the last few years.



Lack of Enforcement

This lack of enforcement and funding has resulted in the police failing to lay drug charges for possession, and the courts taking a lenient approach to illicit drug use. Also, the courts have treated the cultivation of marijuana as only a minor offence, have rarely handed out jail sentences and have awarded fines that amount to no more than a "slap on the wrist". Consequently, these fines are regarded by commercial marijuana growers as merely part of the cost of doing business. As a result, the cultivation of marijuana operations has grown enormously, especially in British Columbia, Ontario and Manitoba, where, alarmingly, this activity has been taken over by organized crime.

Not surprisingly, under these circumstances, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime reported in July 2007, that Canada now has the highest proportion of marijuana users in the industrialized world, reaching 16.8% for those between 15 and 64 years of age. Canada's marijuana use is double that of England (8.6%) and France (8.6%). Canada's high rate of marijuana use, however, can be attributed in large part to the elevated use of marijuana in the province of Quebec, where use is 12% higher than elsewhere in the country.

Harm Reduction Policies

Canada's three-pillar drug policy of enforcement, education and treatment has been further undermined by the advocates of a more permissive drug policy, who are attempting to shift Canada's policy to that of "harm reduction". Harm reduction is based on the proposition that drug use is hard to stop and that individuals will continue to use drugs anyway, so society should live with the non-medical use of drugs and treat it only as a life style choice. In short, these advocates support societal accommodation to illicit drug use rather than stopping it. Under this policy, death is the addict's only release from his addiction.

Harm reduction advocates are being cautious: they have devised drug strategies that infiltrate and become a part of the current official drug policy, while not totally dismantling the system. Their strategies, which solicit police support and cooperation, will, the advocates believe, eventually lead to drug policy reform and a less restrictive approach to illicit drug use in Canada.



The strategies of the "harm reduction" advocates include the following:

1. decriminalizing marijuana;
2. reducing and eliminating penalties for drug offences;
3. providing government supervised drug injection sites; and
4. establishing needle exchange programmes.

Former Liberal Government Supported Harm Reduction Policies

Advocates for harm reduction were successful in inducing the former Liberal government to implement their strategies. For example, the Liberals introduced legislation in 2003, to decriminalize marijuana as far as to allow possession of up to 15 grams (approximately 20 "joints"). This legislation was not passed, however, as the Conservative party formed the government after the January 2006 federal election. Needle exchanges, which, in effect, are really needle distribution centres, because relatively few needles are actually "exchanged", were established across Canada throughout the 1980s and 1990s. A so-called "pilot" drug injection site was also established in Vancouver in 2003. Finally, penalties for drug use have been reduced, as noted above.

Claims by Harm Reduction Advocates

Harm reduction advocates do not openly acknowledge that their real objective is to introduce permissive drug policies. Instead, they claim that their policies will reduce drug deaths, the transmission of blood borne diseases (AIDS, Hepatitis C, etc.) and crime. In reality, just the opposite has occurred: drug deaths have increased, and both disease and crime have