

# The Vancouver Model proposal

## Vancouver's submission for decriminalizing the simple possession of drugs

### Context

In the last five years, almost 1,700 people have died from drug overdoses in Vancouver alone and this cannot continue. Decisive action is needed now and that is why the City of Vancouver and its partners are seeking an exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act under the provision of section 56(1) to decriminalize personal possession of illicit substances.

From approving the Four Pillars Framework in 2001, to sanctioning North America's first legal supervised safe injection site, Vancouver has long been at the forefront of innovative approaches to addressing substance use and is well positioned to act as a leader for decriminalization.

### Proposal

The City is preparing a proposal that will be submitted to Health Canada that asks for a citywide exemption from the offense of simple possession. If approved, people found in possession of controlled substances under a certain threshold amount would not be subject to criminal sanctions,

The proposal will continue to follow Vancouver's health-focused approach to the overdose crisis by:

- Addressing social determinants of health
- Focusing on strategies that address health inequities among people who are disproportionately impacted or overrepresented in the justice system such as Indigenous people, women and gender diverse people, and/or sex workers
- Increasing efforts in health promotion, illness prevention and harm reduction
- Adopting intersectional policies to create a comprehensive approach

The proposed model will focus on three main components - personal use threshold, decision-making and a voluntary alternative referral system to services. These components will form the foundations of engagement with the community and be the basis for further conversations between partners.

Considerable work has already begun on developing the potential thresholds for personal use based on science and research evidence and input from people with lived experience.

The central premise of the proposal is that if VPD identify that someone is in possession of drugs for personal use that is under the threshold amount, they will be able to access to services on a voluntary basis, rather than being subject to criminal charges and/or having their substances and paraphernalia confiscated.

### Next steps

A working group have been established to oversee and coordinate the preparation of the next submission to the federal government on the proposed Vancouver model, with efforts to make this a community-centred approach. The working group is undertaking consultation with the Vancouver Community Action Team that represents organizations and people who are working on or affected by the overdose crisis.

This work will include:

- Informing key communities of interest about the approach and its implementation
- Soliciting input into the overall approach from groups and organizations representing those most affected
- Meaningfully engaging with key informants on technical aspects of the framework and its implementation.

For more information about this work visit [Vancouver.ca/decriminalization](https://vancouver.ca/decriminalization)

