

For immediate release

MAJOR FEDERAL PARTIES PROMISE TO REFORM CANADIAN DRUG POLICY

Solid, growing support for shifting drug policy away from prohibition

TORONTO, October 13, 2015 — Three major federal political parties have come out in support of reforming Canadian drug policy. If elected, they would address Canada’s “drug problem” through sound evidence-based measures that reduce harm and protect public safety, rather than the misinformed and punitive approach that currently dominates the country’s policy.

The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (CDPC), the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, and moms united and mandated to saving the lives of Drug Users (mumsDU), three non-partisan organizations working to reform drug policy in Canada, recently sent a questionnaire to all major federal parties asking five key questions on Canada’s approach to addressing problems related to illegal drugs.

Responses were received from the Green Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Canada. The Conservative Party of Canada did not respond.

The questionnaire asked for each party’s position on various key issues in drug policy:

- harm reduction as a necessary component of Canada’s national drug strategy, including support for life-saving supervised injection services;
- preventing death from drug overdoses, including support for making naloxone a non-prescription drug and enacting “Good Samaritan” legislation;
- new legal approaches to cannabis;
- eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offences (an issue heading to the Supreme Court of Canada in the months ahead); and
- working with other countries at the UN to modernize global drug policies based on evidence, public health objectives and human rights standards.

These issues have recently been before Parliament, are the subject of court challenges, or are under debate in international fora as countries prepare for next spring’s historic special session of the UN General Assembly on “the world drug problem.”

All parties that responded supported the use of supervised consumption services (also known as supervised injection sites) as an integral part of a broader, evidence-based national drug policy. “The parties’ support for evidence-based policymaking is encouraging,” said Richard Elliott, Executive Director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. “The next Parliament needs to repeal the ill-advised and deadly Bill C-2, enacted a few months ago, which is aimed squarely at blocking life-saving supervised injection services.”

On supporting Good Samaritan legislation (to reduce the fear of arrest from calling 911 when faced with an overdose) and increased access to naloxone to overcome deaths by drug overdose, all parties agreed to advocate for sensible drug legislation based on health and human rights. “As parents who have lost children to the epidemic of overdose across Canada, we welcome the parties’ readiness to review laws that make naloxone more readily available, and improve the likelihood of calling emergency services in the event of an overdose,” said Donna D. May of mumsDU. “These measures mean that other parents may not have to endure the loss and grief that we have had to endure.”

On the topic of cannabis, all the responding parties promised to reverse ineffectual policies and pursue a new approach, shifting away from outright prohibition and towards some form of regulation. The Liberals and Greens said they would legalize and regulate marijuana, while the NDP pledged to decriminalize possession of small amounts. (It should also be noted that during Parliament's recent study on cannabis, both the [NDP](#) and the [Liberal Party](#) formally committed to exploring options for an appropriate regime for regulating cannabis).

"With a major international meeting on drug policy at the United Nations coming up in April 2016, it's gratifying to know that all the opposition parties, should one of them form government, have committed to developing a drug policy based on evidence of what works," said Donald MacPherson, Executive Director of Canadian Drug Policy Coalition. "Perhaps we could then begin to move away from using the criminal law as the primary instrument of drug control in Canada."

For more information:

- For the complete questionnaire and the parties' responses, go to <http://drugpolicy.ca/2015/10/questionnaire/> or www.aidslaw.ca/election2015.
- Last week, CDPC and the Legal Network released three evidence-based policy briefs on [overdose prevention and response](#), [harm reduction](#) and [cannabis](#), which outline current problems, key facts and figures, and our proposed solutions for implementation by a new government following the election.
- For additional information on Bill C-2 and its impediments to supervised consumption sites, see "An Injection of Reason," a [Q&A brief](#) produced by the Legal Network and CDPC.
- For more about the upcoming UN meeting, see this backgrounder: "[UNGASS 2016 and Canada's contribution to international drug policy reform](#)."

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