



Council Member Motion
For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of September 4, 2025

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** August 22nd, 2025
From: Councillor Gardiner
Subject: B.C. exemption by Health Canada from the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*

BACKGROUND

At the request of the Province of British Columbia, Health Canada granted the province of B.C. a three-year exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize the use of illicit drugs. This exemption came into effect on January 31, 2023. I want to acknowledge Jeff Bray of the Downtown Victoria Business Association for reminding us that the exemption comes to an end at the end of January, 2026.

Currently, possessing small amounts of certain illicit drugs for personal use in specific locations is allowed. Consumption in open public places has been disallowed as of May, 2024.

Schematics from the May 2025 BC Data report to Health Canada are appended. From 2022 to 2023, BC experienced a 5% increase in drug-related deaths. BC reported a decrease in drug-related deaths in 2024. During this period, proactive services, including outreach workers, were put in place to connect people to recovery supports instead of legal consequences.

Regrettably, the drug crisis continues to take lives, disrupt families and make many of our streets “no go” zones. The exemption to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act has been especially harmful to those who are vulnerable, those with mental health problems and to those who are homeless. They have been put in harm's way by the acceptance and normalization of open drug use on our streets and places sanctioned for illicit drug use such as low barrier housing and other provincial government funded facilities.

The people of Victoria are not insensitive to the plight of those caught in the grip of addiction. For the general public, the issue is the ongoing failure to recognize the abject failure of this experiment in social reengineering.

“Harm reduction” is an obscene phrase that obscures the harm done by illicit drug use. The attendant social pathologies of illicit drug use are threatening to damage the economic wellbeing of our city and the reputation of Victoria as a safe place to live and work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council ask the Mayor to send a letter to the Hon. Marjorie Michel, Minister of Health Canada, stating:

- City of Victoria Council notes that the three-year exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize the use of illicit drugs will expire on January 31, 2026, and
 - City of Victoria Council will not support the renewal or extension of the exemption.
2. That the letter be copied to BC Premier David Eby, Hon. Josie Osbourne BC Minister of Health, Hon. Niki Sharma BC Attorney General, Hon. Nina Krieger, Hon. Grace Lore, Ms. Darlene Rotchford, and Mr. Will Greaves, MP.

Respectfully submitted,



Councillor Gardiner

Appendix:

Decriminalization Data Report to Health Canada February 2023 - January 2025 Submitted May 2025



