

Evaluation of the Decriminalization of Illegal Drugs in British Columbia

Findings from Year 2

On January 31st, 2023, the province of British Columbia (BC) decriminalized the personal possession of up to 2.5 g of opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine, and MDMA among adults (18+) for a period of three years. This decriminalization initiative aims to reduce stigma, criminalization, and associated harms for people who use drugs (PWUD), while improving access to health services, trust in law enforcement, and public awareness of drug use as a health issue.

The **Ontario Node of the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Matters (OCRINT)** is conducting a five-year independent evaluation of the decriminalization policy to assess its impact across the following domains:



Public Opinion Poll

Overview

- Public sentiment plays a large role in the outcome of drug policies such as decriminalization.
- It is important to assess the extent to which decriminalization is achieving its intended goals, particularly in regards to shifting public discourse toward a health-based approach.
- Understanding public attitudes can help policymakers identify gaps in awareness, and provide insights into the broader social and political climate surrounding decriminalization.
- In collaboration with *IPSOS*, a public opinion polling firm, OCRINT is conducting yearly cross-sectional surveys among a representative sample of approximately **n=1,500** English-speaking adults (18+) residing in BC.
- This sub-study aims to evaluate and characterize the BC public's awareness, understanding, perceptions, and attitudes towards decriminalization, as well as how views may evolve over the course of its implementation.

Methods

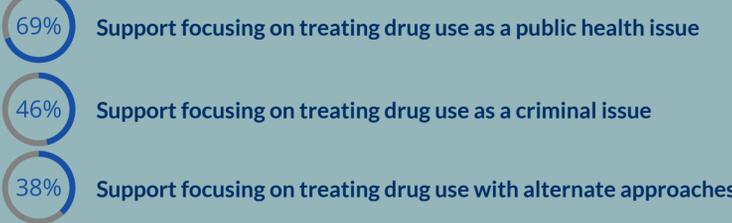
- The second survey was distributed between February 12 - 18, 2025. Results are presented below.
- Survey items assessed support and attitudes towards decriminalization, comparing these results to findings from the previous year.
- The survey also examined support of and attitudes toward the policy amendment introduced in May 2024 to re-criminalize drug use and possession in public spaces.
- Responses were weighted to reflect the BC population based on census data for region, age, gender, and education.

Results

Sample Characteristics (n=1,200)



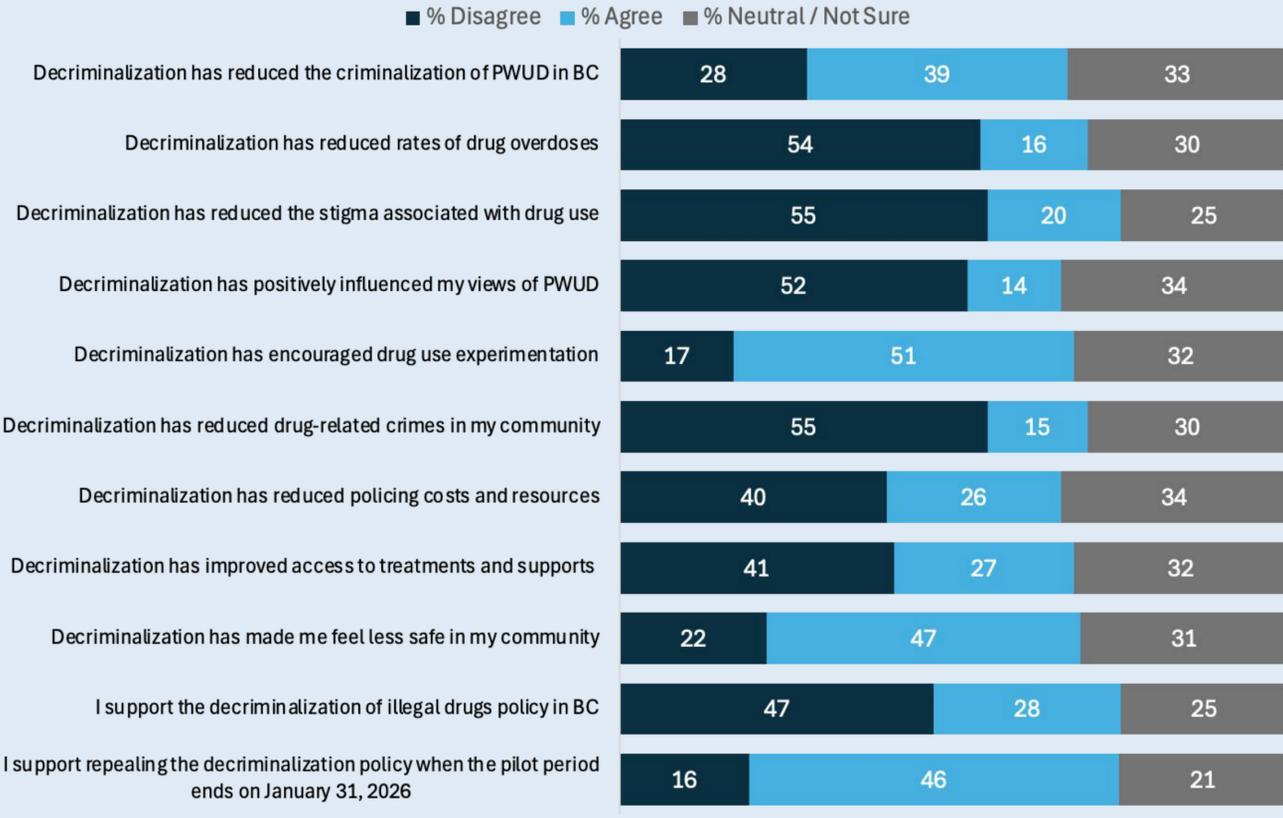
Approaches to Addressing Drug Use



27% of BC residents agree that politics influences their level of support for the decriminalization policy.

31% disagree that politics has an influence, while **34%** are neutral.

Attitudes Toward Decriminalization (n=1,200)



Perceived Benefits of Decriminalization

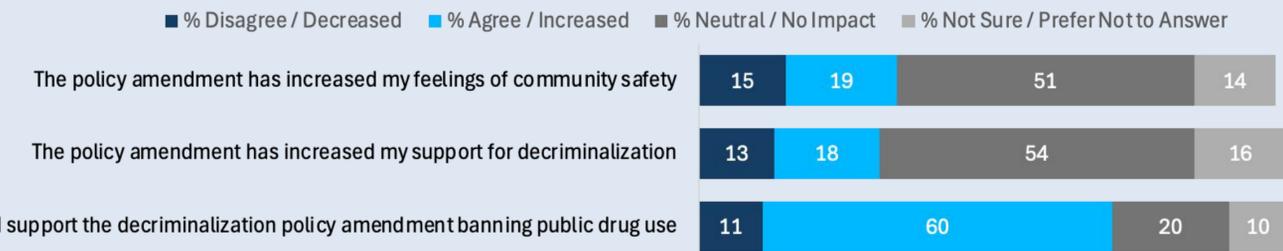
- Improved access to substance use services and treatment
- Reduced criminalization of drug use
- Reducing risk of overdose for PWUD
- Reduced policing costs and resources
- Reduced stigma associated with drug use

Perceived Concerns of Decriminalization

- Increased public drug use
- Easier access/exposure to drugs among youth and non-users
- Reduced public safety
- Increased addiction and related harms
- Increased costs to health and justice systems

Attitudes Toward Re-Criminalization Amendment (n=1,200)

68% Were either aware of or familiar with the recent amendment banning public drug use and possession



Implications & Next Steps

- More people appear to oppose the decriminalization policy rather than support it, and opposition of the policy has increased over the past year.
- Nearly half of participants support repealing the decriminalization policy once the pilot period ends in January 2026.
- Open drug use in public spaces continued to be a major concern among participants in Year 2, and an increasing proportion of participants indicated that policy has made them feel less safe in their community.
- While the majority of participants supported the recent amendment re-criminalizing public drug use and possession, the amendment has minimally impacted feelings of community safety, and support for decriminalization among participants.
- The next survey will be launched in 2026.

Source: Ipsos. (2025). 2025 Survey On Decriminalization Of Illicit Drugs In British Columbia. [Unpublished Report].