

# **SURVEY ON DECRIMINALIZATION OF ILLICIT DRUGS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**Draft Report**

---

April 17, 2024

**camh**  
mental health is health



# Methodology

This report presents the results of an online survey conducted on behalf of The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

The survey includes 1,202 adult (18+) British Columbians and was fielded March 26 to April 1, 2024.

Data has been weighted to reflect the British Columbia population age 18+ based on Census data for region, age, gender and education.

The precision of Ipsos polls containing online data is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the overall poll is accurate to within +/-3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all British Columbia adults been polled.

- The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

Due to rounding, not all charts and tables in this report will add to exactly 100% and not all summary statistics will be exactly equal to the sum of their component parts.

## Consent Text at Introduction

*The next few questions are being asked on behalf of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). These questions examine the general public's perceptions of the decriminalization of illicit drugs in British Columbia. Questions will ask about your awareness of the policy, your support or opposition to the policy, your feelings of community safety, and whether you think the policy will impact a number of different factors.*

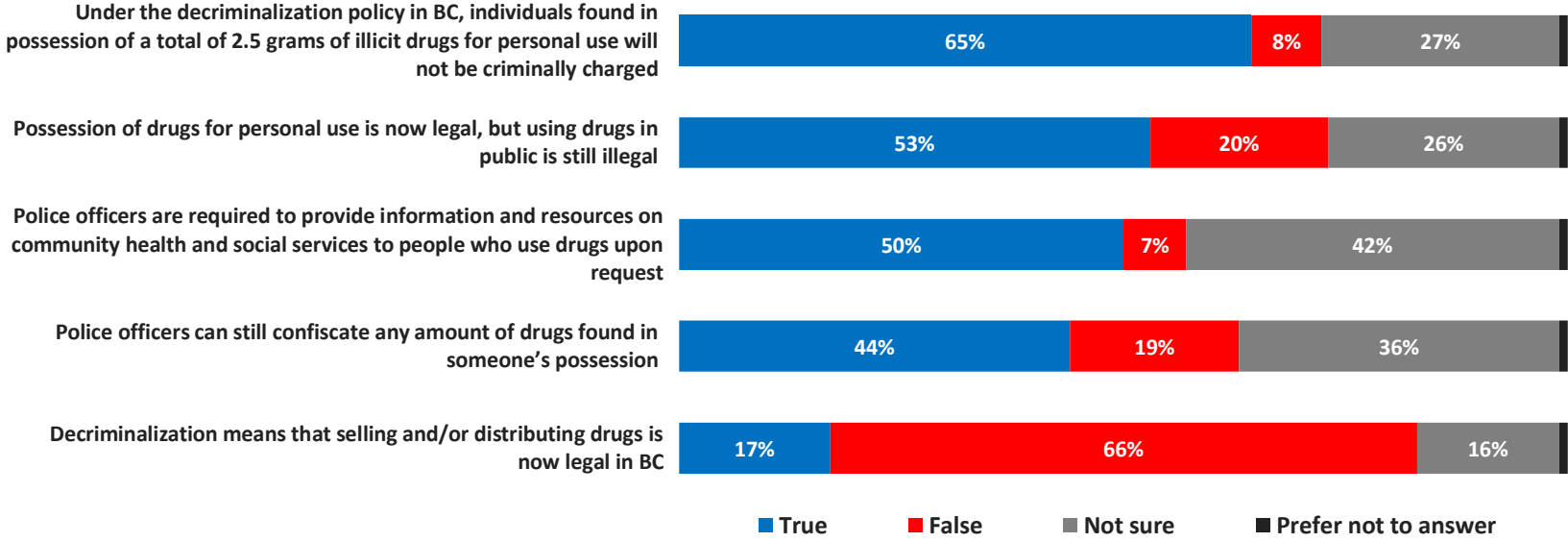
*It is your choice whether you decide to answer these questions or not. While the research team doesn't expect significant physical or mental risks associated with study participation, some participants may be reluctant to describe their perspectives. You do not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with. The information learned may help inform public health policy making regarding the decriminalization of illicit substances.*

*If you have questions about this study, you can talk to the researcher who is in charge of the study at CAMH: Cayley Russell (Email: [OCRINTProject@camh.ca](mailto:OCRINTProject@camh.ca)). If you have questions about your rights as a participant or about ethical aspects of this study, you can talk to the CAMH Chair of the Research Ethics Board (REB) at 416-535-8501 ext. 36798.*

# DETAILED RESULTS

# True/False Statements About Decriminalization

Two-thirds (65%) of British Columbians believe it is true that possession of 2.5 grams of illicit drugs for personal use will not result in a criminal charge. Two-thirds (66%) also think it is false that selling/distributing drugs is now legal in BC. There is some confusion about whether the police can still confiscate any amount of drugs found in someone's possession. Slightly more than four-in-ten (44%) say this is true, while two-in-ten (19%) say it is false and 36% are unsure.



Q1. On January 31 2022, the province of British Columbia was granted a three-year exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) which allows adults aged 18+ in the province to legally possess a small amount of illegal drugs for personal possession. Based on your knowledge of the decriminalization of illegal drugs policy in BC, are the following statements true or false?



# True/False Statements About Decriminalization by Demos

Younger residents are much less likely to say it is true that possession of 2.5 grams of illicit drugs for personal use will not result in a criminal charge.  
 Younger residents are also much more likely to say it is true that police officers can still confiscate any amount of drugs found in someone's possession.

## True

	Total	Region					Sex		Age				Education			Race	
		Van Coastal	Fraser	Island	Interior	North	Male	Female	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	HS or Less	Some PostSec	Univ Grad	White	Non-White
Sample Size	1,202	270	452	211	130	51	569	618	156	365	330	351	236	457	509	714	382
Under the decriminalization policy in BC, individuals found in possession of a total of 2.5 grams of illicit drugs for personal use will not be criminally charged	65%	64%	68%	64%	68%	54%	66%	63%	46%	65%	68%	70%	60%	67%	67%	68%	58%
Possession of drugs for personal use is now legal, but using drugs in public is still illegal	53%	50%	54%	55%	50%	60%	53%	53%	53%	55%	53%	50%	50%	55%	52%	52%	54%
Police officers are required to provide information and resources on community health and social services to people who use drugs upon request	50%	47%	54%	50%	51%	49%	50%	51%	50%	58%	49%	45%	50%	50%	51%	52%	48%
Police officers can still confiscate any amount of drugs found in someone's possession	44%	40%	49%	46%	34%	39%	46%	41%	58%	46%	42%	37%	44%	41%	46%	42%	50%
Decriminalization means that selling and/or distributing drugs is now legal in BC	17%	17%	20%	14%	11%	17%	15%	19%	19%	19%	18%	14%	13%	18%	19%	13%	26%

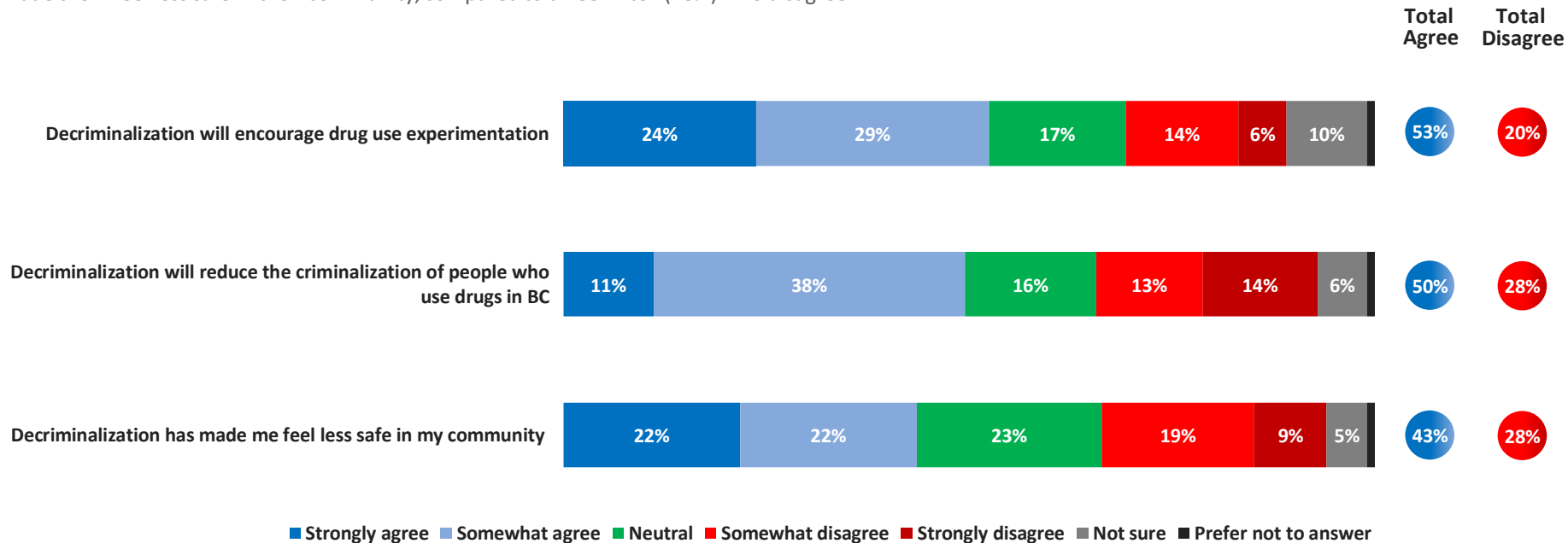
Statistically higher    Statistically lower

Q1. On January 31 2022, the province of British Columbia was granted a three-year exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) which allows adults aged 18+ in the province to legally possess a small amount of illegal drugs for personal possession. Based on your knowledge of the decriminalization of illegal drugs policy in BC, are the following statements true or false?



# Agree/Disagree Statements About Impact of Decriminalization (slide 1 of 3)

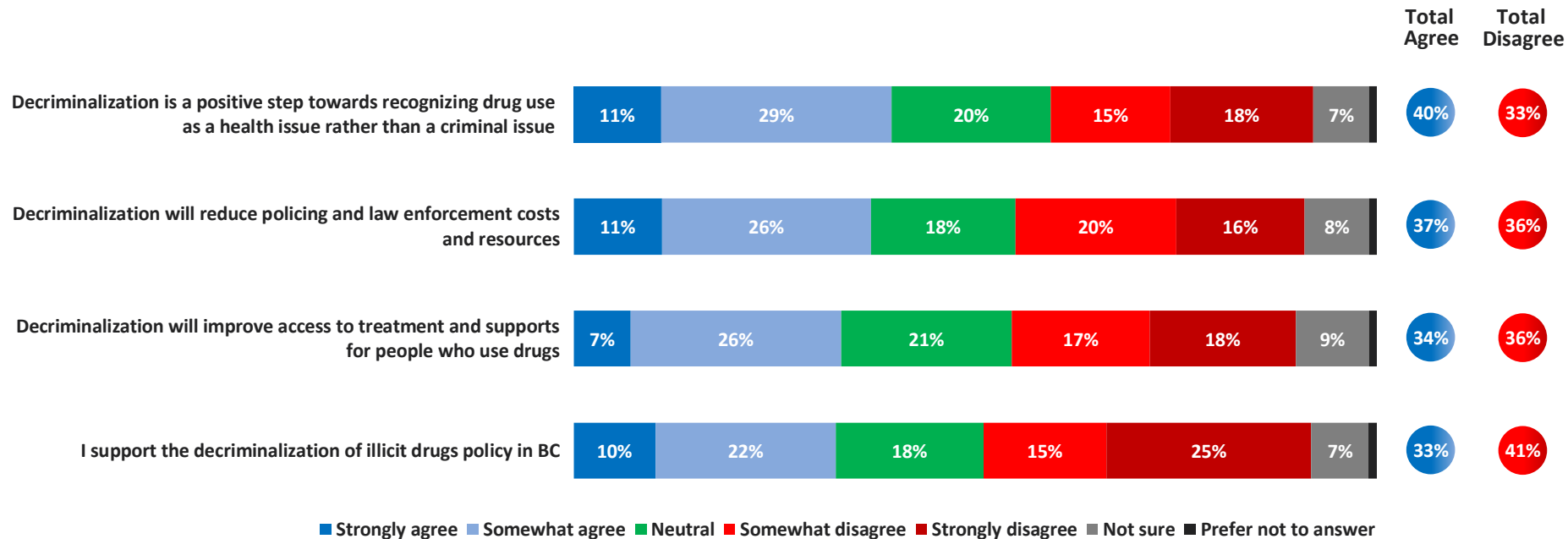
British Columbians are more likely to agree than disagree that decriminalization will encourage drug use experimentation (53% agree vs. 20% disagree) and that it will reduce the criminalization of people who use drugs in BC (50% agree vs. 28% disagree). Roughly four-in-ten (43%) agree decriminalization has made them feel less safe in their community, compared to three-in-ten (28%) who disagree.



Q2. Under decriminalization, adults are allowed to possess up to a cumulative total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine/crack-cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA for personal possession. Amounts carried above 2.5 grams will still be criminalized. The BC government's stated goals of decriminalization are to reduce the harms associated with substance use, including stigma and criminalization, as well as to support people who use drugs to access health and social services, ultimately redirecting them away from the criminal justice system. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding the potential impact of decriminalization of illegal drugs in BC.

## Agree/Disagree Statements About Impact of Decriminalization (slide 2 of 3)

British Columbians are split on all the impacts of decriminalization listed in the chart below. They are especially split on whether it will reduce policing and law enforcement costs/resources (37% agree vs. 36% disagree) and whether it will improve access to treatment/supports (34% agree vs. 36% disagree).

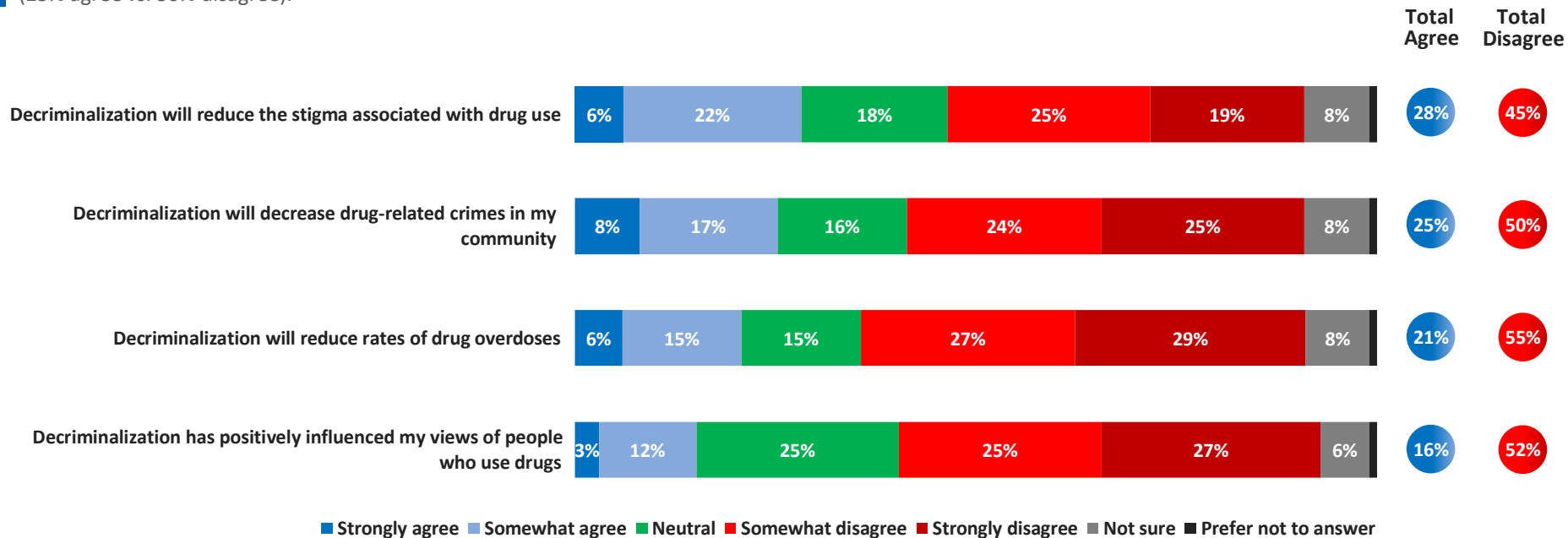


Q2. Under decriminalization, adults are allowed to possess up to a cumulative total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine/crack-cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA for personal possession. Amounts carried above 2.5 grams will still be criminalized. The BC government's stated goals of decriminalization are to reduce the harms associated with substance use, including stigma and criminalization, as well as to support people who use drugs to access health and social services, ultimately redirecting them away from the criminal justice system. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding the potential impact of decriminalization of illegal drugs in BC.



# Agree/Disagree Statements About Impact of Decriminalization (slide 3 of 3)

A narrow majority of British Columbians disagree that decriminalization will reduce rates of drug overdoses (21% agree vs. 55% disagree), that it has positively influenced their views of people who use drugs (16% agree vs. 52% disagree) and that it will decrease drug-related crimes in their community (25% agree vs. 50% disagree).



Q2. Under decriminalization, adults are allowed to possess up to a cumulative total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine/crack-cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA for personal possession. Amounts carried above 2.5 grams will still be criminalized. The BC government's stated goals of decriminalization are to reduce the harms associated with substance use, including stigma and criminalization, as well as to support people who use drugs to access health and social services, ultimately redirecting them away from the criminal justice system. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding the potential impact of decriminalization of illegal drugs in BC.

# Agree/Disagree Statements About Impact of Decriminalization by Demos (slide 1 of 3)

There are few differences in the statements below across the demographic segments.

## Total Agree

	Total	Region					Sex		Age				Education			Race	
		Van Coastal	Fraser	Island	Interior	North	Male	Female	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	HS or Less	Some PostSec	Univ Grad	White	Non-White
Sample Size	1,202	270	452	211	130	51	569	618	156	365	330	351	236	457	509	714	382
Decriminalization will encourage drug use experimentation	53%	55%	55%	53%	45%	47%	56%	51%	49%	49%	52%	58%	50%	56%	53%	52%	59%
Decriminalization will reduce the criminalization of people who use drugs in BC	50%	51%	48%	49%	55%	46%	51%	48%	49%	51%	45%	52%	45%	49%	54%	51%	48%
Decriminalization has made me feel less safe in my community	43%	45%	47%	41%	36%	36%	45%	43%	37%	43%	42%	47%	43%	45%	41%	43%	47%

Statistically higher
Statistically lower

Q2. Under decriminalization, adults are allowed to possess up to a cumulative total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine/crack-cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA for personal possession. Amounts carried above 2.5 grams will still be criminalized. The BC government's stated goals of decriminalization are to reduce the harms associated with substance use, including stigma and criminalization, as well as to support people who use drugs to access health and social services, ultimately redirecting them away from the criminal justice system. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding the potential impact of decriminalization of illegal drugs in BC.

# Agree/Disagree Statements About Impact of Decriminalization by Demos (slide 2 of 3)

Boomer aged British Columbians are less likely to agree decriminalization is a positive step toward viewing drug use as a health issue, that it will reduce police/law enforcement costs and that it will improve access to treatment/supports. The Boomer segment is also less likely to agree they support the decriminalization of illicit drugs policy in BC.

## Total Agree

	Total	Region					Sex		Age				Education			Race	
		Van Coastal	Fraser	Island	Interior	North	Male	Female	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	HS or Less	Some PostSec	Univ Grad	White	Non-White
Sample Size	1,202	270	452	211	130	51	569	618	156	365	330	351	236	457	509	714	382
Decriminalization is a positive step towards recognizing drug use as a health issue rather than a criminal issue	40%	41%	38%	42%	39%	40%	40%	39%	47%	45%	37%	35%	36%	39%	44%	41%	38%
Decriminalization will reduce policing and law enforcement costs and resources	37%	42%	38%	32%	28%	42%	36%	37%	41%	45%	36%	29%	38%	31%	42%	33%	44%
Decriminalization will improve access to treatment and supports for people who use drugs	34%	41%	35%	29%	25%	39%	35%	32%	46%	40%	30%	27%	31%	33%	37%	32%	38%
I support the decriminalization of illicit drugs policy in BC	33%	33%	32%	35%	29%	35%	35%	30%	41%	42%	31%	24%	31%	31%	36%	32%	34%

Statistically higher    Statistically lower

Q2. Under decriminalization, adults are allowed to possess up to a cumulative total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine/crack-cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA for personal possession. Amounts carried above 2.5 grams will still be criminalized. The BC government's stated goals of decriminalization are to reduce the harms associated with substance use, including stigma and criminalization, as well as to support people who use drugs to access health and social services, ultimately redirecting them away from the criminal justice system. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding the potential impact of decriminalization of illegal drugs in BC.

# Agree/Disagree Statements About Impact of Decriminalization by Demos (slide 3 of 3)

Boomer aged British Columbians are less likely to agree decriminalization will reduce stigma, that it will decrease drug related crime, that it will reduce rates of overdoses and that it has positively influenced their views of people who use drugs.

## Total Agree

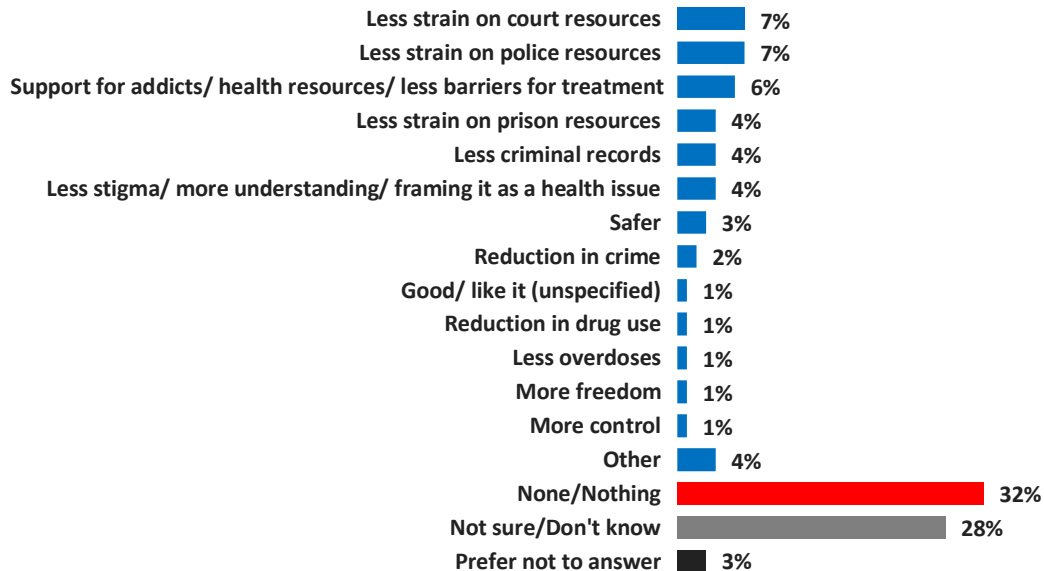
	Total	Region					Sex		Age				Education			Race	
		Van Coastal	Fraser	Island	Interior	North	Male	Female	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	HS or Less	Some PostSec	Univ Grad	White	Non-White
Sample Size	1,202	270	452	211	130	51	569	618	156	365	330	351	236	457	509	714	382
Decriminalization will reduce the stigma associated with drug use	28%	31%	28%	28%	23%	25%	31%	24%	43%	35%	24%	19%	25%	27%	31%	25%	36%
Decriminalization will decrease drug-related crimes in my community	25%	28%	24%	26%	24%	22%	28%	22%	35%	30%	22%	19%	23%	25%	28%	22%	31%
Decriminalization will reduce rates of drug overdoses	21%	24%	22%	20%	14%	17%	23%	19%	38%	31%	16%	12%	22%	19%	23%	17%	31%
Decriminalization has positively influenced my views of people who use drugs	16%	18%	16%	12%	12%	17%	16%	16%	31%	18%	14%	9%	17%	15%	15%	12%	23%

Statistically higher    Statistically lower

Q2. Under decriminalization, adults are allowed to possess up to a cumulative total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine/crack-cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA for personal possession. Amounts carried above 2.5 grams will still be criminalized. The BC government's stated goals of decriminalization are to reduce the harms associated with substance use, including stigma and criminalization, as well as to support people who use drugs to access health and social services, ultimately redirecting them away from the criminal justice system. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding the potential impact of decriminalization of illegal drugs in BC.

## Main Benefits of Decriminalization (coded open-ended responses)

Six-in-ten (60%) British Columbians did not provide an open-ended main benefit to the decriminalization policy. The top benefits mentioned include less strain on court resources (7%), less strain on police resources (7%) and more support/resources for treatment.

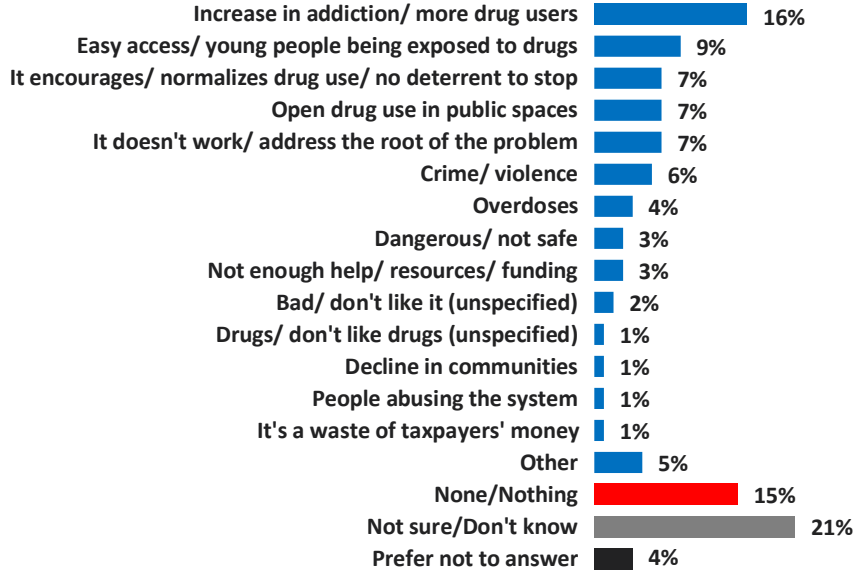


Q3. Please describe what you feel the main benefit of the decriminalization policy is.

Base: All respondents (n=1,202)

# Main Concerns of Decriminalization (coded open-ended responses)

More than one-in-three (36%) British Columbians did not provide an open-ended main concern about the decriminalization policy. The top concerns mentioned include increased addiction/drug use (16%), easy access/exposure for young people (9%), encouraging/normalizing drug use (7%), open drug use in public (7%) and that it doesn't work or address the root problem (7%).



Q4. Please describe what your main concern with the decriminalization policy is.

Base: All respondents (n=1,202)

# WEIGHTED SAMPLE PROFILE

# Weighted Sample Profile

	Total (n=1,202)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	48%
Female	51%
Other/Prefer not to answer	1%
<b>Age</b>	
Gen Z	14%
Millennial	26%
Gen X	25%
Boomer+	36%
<b>Health Authority</b>	
Vancouver Coastal	20%
Fraser	37%
Island	17%
Interior	14%
Northern	5%
Unknown	7%

	Total (n=1,202)
<b>Education</b>	
High school or less	42%
Some post secondary	35%
University graduates	34%
<b>Household Income</b>	
<\$40K	26%
\$40K to <\$60K	18%
\$60K to <\$100K	26%
\$100K+	22%
Refused	8%

	Total (n=1,202)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White	63%
Chinese	11%
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	7%
Black	3%
Filipino	2%
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, etc.)	2%
Latin American	1%
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)	1%
Korean	1%
Japanese	1%
Arab	<1%
Other	2%
Prefer not to answer	3%



**camh**  
mental health is health

