

What Does Drug Decriminalization Mean for Youth, According to Service Providers?

Decriminalization allowed adults (18+) to carry under 2.5 g of certain drugs without being arrested or having their drugs taken away.

Note: This study was conducted before BC ended its drug decriminalization pilot program in January 2026.

Who was the study about?

- Service providers at Foundry Vancouver-Granville who support youth ages 15–24 who use drugs, including:



Case managers, nurses, occupational therapists, peer support workers, physicians and social workers.

What was done?

- A** • Co-designed, community-based interviews held online and in person.
 - Explored provider experiences, service delivery and impacts of decriminalization.
- B** • Analyzed responses to find patterns and themes.

What was found?

“There is no one-size-fits-all solution”

Providers said decriminalization didn’t change their practice or improve safety. Youth still faced an unsafe, unpredictable drug supply.



The policy excluded youth under 18 and the 2.5 g limit didn’t reflect real use, showing why youth and providers must be included in policy design.

Providers called for prevention-focused supports that address housing, stigma and other conditions shaping substance use.



What this means to youth and family:

As conversations about decriminalization evolve, youth and service providers need a real seat at the table to:

- Create policies that reflect lived experience.
- Address the needs of youth under 18 who are often overlooked.
- Help policymakers understand that drug policy must account for stigma and social conditions shaping youth experiences.



What we’re still learning:

Youth and family still wonder: “What specific and actionable upstream initiatives and youth perspectives are needed to reduce stigma and better address the drug toxicity crisis?”



Co-created with the Findings for Foundry Committee, a group of youth and family advisors.

Source

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