

CANADIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS WANT CHANGE IN DRUG POLICY

Drug policy influences individuals, institutions and organizations, governments, society and our world. Canadian civil society groups responding to a recent paper published by the emerging Canadian Drug Policy Consortium are looking for change.

Dominant themes in the responses included that major change must take place in the way substances are regulated and controlled, and that harm reduction in its broadest sense must underpin all policy development, policing and practice. Responses to substance-related problems need to be addressed through health initiatives while the negative behaviours associated with substance use will require complementary policing. Health and public safety should be addressed in a partnership designed to reduce the harm to persons using substances, their families and the community.

The civil society groups responding to the paper were pointed about changes needed at several levels. They are also committed to being part of the solution.

CANADIAN SOCIETY

Canadian society recognizes that addiction is a complex social, economic, cultural and health issue. Greater attention must be given to the implications for how we treat people who use drugs including those caught in the web of addiction. Civil society groups are committed to developing social mechanisms to support individuals in maximizing wellness. This requires policies and legislation that do not discriminate against or stigmatise people for using substances but that promote inclusion and social responsibility.

- ✓ People have access to accurate information about drugs and potential risks and benefits
- ✓ All people, including those who use drugs, are valued as contributing members of society
- ✓ Schools, faith communities, health and social services and other community institutions support personal and social development rather than impose solutions

MEANING OF SUCCESS

CANADIAN GOVERNMENTS

Federal, provincial and municipal governments need to approach substance use as a health issue and reform policies and legislation accordingly.

According to civil society groups, Canada needs a national strategy to reduce the harms from substance use. This means including harm reduction as a criterion for policy at every level of government. Governments should support honest dialogue about the realities of substance use and its impacts, including the social, cultural, health and economic roots of substance use problems. People need access to the services and supports that address the problems. They also need governments to deal with the social conditions that contribute to the problems.

Governments need to move, in consultation with all key stakeholders, to re-regulate the production, distribution and consumption of currently illegal substances in line with public health and human rights principles.

DRUG POLICY

CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR CANADA

- ✓ provide policy and legislative guidance on how to reform laws and policies to reflect substance use as a health issue, while also acknowledging that responses to substance use needs to reflect local cultural contexts and values
- ✓ support and provide guidance to encourage the widespread implementation of harm reduction services

A VISION FOR THE UN

VISION AND MISSION OF CDPC

The CDPC envisions a safe, healthy, and just Canada in which drug policy and legislation, as well as related institutional practice, are based on evidence, human rights, social inclusion and public health.

Its mission is to facilitate improvement in Canadian and international drug policy and legislation by:

- Producing and advancing constructive policy recommendations
- Building sustainable, mutually enhancing partnerships
- Assembling and disseminating clear information and analysis
- Fostering productive dialogue and action within civil society

AND THE PEOPLE SAID ...

When asked to respond to a paper on the involvement of Canadian civil society in drug policy issues, representatives had lots to say. The comments throughout this sheet, including the following, represent what they said.

- We want to be engaged in discussion and action on substance use, harm reduction and policy options.
- We want people to be safe from the harms of substance use.
- We want our institutions to develop and adopt policies which serve people. They should not discriminate against people who use substances. They should engage in prevention, education, harm reduction, treatment, support, and information.
- We want our police to be guardians of human rights, treat people who use substances with respect and dignity, not as criminals, and refer them to the proper services to maintain and improve their health.
- We want our health authorities to lead in the development of innovative and community-based responses to problematic substance use.
- We want our politicians to campaign powerfully, on local, national and international levels to address stigma and ensure that people who produce, sell or use substances are treated equitably and with respect.
- We want to learn the courage to speak up when others are denied services or care. We want to change our world for the better. We are ready to be part of the solution.