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Public Health Association of BC (PHABC) Position Statement

Issue: Regulation of Psychoactive Substances

The Public Health Association of BC is concerned with the current approach to the regulation of psychoactive substances. The misuse of psychoactive substances creates a significant burden of disease and is a leading cause of death in our society. The burden of disease also falls inequitably on certain groups in society such as those with mental health challenges and the First Nations population. It is also clear that an approach to regulation that emphasizes prohibition has failed even with the huge investment in law enforcement (estimated at \$5.4 billion compared to less than \$150 million in prevention - see Health Officers Council Report listed in resource section). The misuse of psychoactive substances is a health issue, not a criminal issue. Drug laws and policies designed without regard for evidence will continue to hurt those who use drugs, their families and their communities.

PHABC Position:

PHABC believes that a new regulatory approach based on public health strategies is needed to address the issue of psychoactive substance use. Such an approach should incorporate prevention, a range of treatment services and modalities and harm reduction. Fundamental to the preventive approach is a well-developed societal commitment to early childhood education that emphasizes those factors that build resilience throughout life including protective factors such as social connectedness, a strong health education component is also critical beginning at early ages so that young people have a strong understanding of psychoactive substances and the risks associated with their use. Harm reduction strategies are important to facilitate skills for self-care, reduce personal risk, improve access to treatment, support reintegration, reduce the spread of diseases, reduce public expense, and save lives.

Resources used in the development of this position statement:

Canadian Drug Policy Coalition report: Changing the Frame; A New Approach to Drug Policy

Health Officers Council of BC report: Public Health Perspectives for Regulating Psychoactive Substances