



Public Health Association of British Columbia
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The Honourable Prime Minister Stephen Harper
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2
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April 18, 2012

Dear Sir,

RE: Regulation of Psychoactive Substances

I am writing to you as President of the Public Health Association of BC. The Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the public's health by working to strengthen disease and injury prevention, health promotion, health protection and healthy public policy. We fulfill our mission through education, advocacy and networking.

PHABC 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. 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 believes that a new regulatory approach based on effective, evidence-based 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 as well as harm reduction. Fundamental to the prevention 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 into society, reduce the spread of diseases, reduce public expense, and save lives.

PHABC encourages your government to consider creating a new regulatory approach as suggested above. The current crime legislation is not consistent with this approach nor is it consistent with the evidence on effectiveness. Furthermore, resistance by the Federal Government to safe injection sites is also inconsistent with the position stressed in this letter.

Sincerely,

Marjorie MacDonald
President