



## Media Statement

*For immediate release*

### **Civil Society Organizations Renew Call for Drug Decriminalization The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police now recognizes harms of criminalization**

*The following statement is issued by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, and Pivot Legal Society.*

**July 10, 2020** — Yesterday, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACCP) released a report calling for an end to the criminalization of simple drug possession (i.e. possession for personal use). Police chiefs across the country “agree the evidence suggests, and numerous Canadian health leaders support, decriminalization for simple possession as an effective way to reduce the public health and public safety harms associated with substance use.” The report affirms that a “compelling case” has been made for “transformative change” to Canada’s current approach to drug possession. **We welcome this important acknowledgement by law enforcement and urge the federal government to decriminalize now.**

**Support for change is growing.** Public health experts and civil society organizations across the country have long called for drug decriminalization. Now the CACCP has publicly added its voice to the call to end the criminalization of simple possession.

**The way forward is clear: We need full decriminalization that leaves behind any and all criminal sanctions and other penalties for the offence of possession.**

Our current system of criminalization causes myriad harms to public health and to racialized communities, including the over policing and prosecution of Black and Indigenous communities. Criminalization is rooted in, and also drives, stigma and racism. This is wrong and must end.

In Canada, there is a simple and immediate remedy to the harms of punitive drug policy. **Federal Minister of Health Patty Hajdu can effectively decriminalize simple drug possession by granting a nation-wide exemption from this offence under section 56 of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*.** There is no need, nor any excuse, for delay, particularly amid unprecedented overdose deaths. We call for greater investment in health services, including culturally sensitive harm reduction and treatment options, and for action to ensure a safer supply of drugs than the toxic illegal market. But these measures must happen in addition to — not instead of — immediate decriminalization. **We can and must remove all penalties, whether criminal, administrative, or other, for simple drug possession now.**

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#### **Interviews**

We have legal and drug policy experts available for interview in both English and French. See contact details below.

#### **More Information:**

Our [recent open letter to the federal government has been co-signed by more than 160 organizations](#) nationwide, representing thousands of Canadians. It outlines the depth of support for decriminalization of simple drug possession and solutions that the federal government can take immediately.

#### **Contact**

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