



Prohibition still does not work

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Prohibition did not work in the 1920s, so why would we expect different results in

2009? Banning substances, declaring ‘war’ on drugs, punishing and scolding ‘bad’ people who partake do not work. Proof of that is everywhere.

For psychoactive drugs—for example alcohol, pain killers, marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, methamphetamine and heroin—prohibition does not work. The effects of prohibition are widespread, affecting individuals, families and communities.

For the individual there are health effects including overdose, death, HIV and more. There is violence from other users and dealers, entry into the sex trade to finance addictions and involvement in other criminal activities. Families are damaged by parents’ inability to care for their children and holding down a steady job or sustaining relationships is increasingly difficult as more and more time is spent on searching for drugs and money.

At the community level we get underground labs producing hazardous productions, drug trade violence and related crime. A black market and the profits it generates fuels organized crime. On a higher level, we also see a lack of respect for laws and other people. And on a societal level, there is the opportunity cost of using public funds for the so-called war on drugs instead of helping people.

Prohibition is obviously not the solution. What is?

The Health Officers Council of BC (HOC) is proposing a change to the current, failed, approach of prohibition. Specifically, they have asked the Prime Minister of Canada to “take the lead role in initiating

a national public discussion that moves toward the development and implementation of a system of regulation and control of currently illegal substances within a framework of public health and human rights.”

Yes, an end to prohibition. A century of prohibition in Canada has not only failed to curtail the illegal drug market and reduce access to illicit substances, it has contributed significantly to increasing the harms related to drug use including health effects, public disorder and the entrenchment of criminal organizations in the illegal drug trade. The HOC believes that committing further public resources “to such an obviously flawed policy is not in the public interest. Alternative approaches that are more cost effective and provide maximum economic and social benefit should be explored.”

The end of prohibition is also being put forward by the [Beyond Prohibition Coalition](#). Members include former Vancouver mayor Philip Owen, Libby Davies (MP, Vancouver East), the BC Civil Liberties Association and others. They believe that focus should be

on helping people, not criminalizing them.

They believe that Canada’s approach to illegal drugs should be improving access to treatment programs for

those with addictions. They propose to end prohibition in order to protect citizens from the harmful effects of the illegal drug trade and drug use; to promote better use of public resources; and to reduce public disorder and minimize the involvement of organized crime in drug trafficking.

Prohibition did not work in 1920. It is no better a solution today.

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