

Canada's Drug Futures Forum

Summary of Proceedings and Final Recommendations

From April 4-5, 2017, a multidisciplinary team of scholars convened *Canada's Drug Futures Forum* in Ottawa, on traditional Algonquin territory. The goal of the Forum was to bring together academics, policymakers, and community leaders to document priorities for Canadian drug policy in the coming decade. This Forum reflects and builds upon rapid drug policy reform in Canada, and makes a concerted effort to include divergent voices and positions on this issue.

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The agenda for the Forum was built around four key themes generated by the organizing committee: international management and control, integrating criminal justice and public health responses, decriminalization and regulation, and strategies for health and social equity. With the help of an advisory committee comprising leaders in relevant areas of research, advocacy, policy, and practice, speakers were invited to join panels that stimulated a dialogue on policy options corresponding to each of the four Forum themes. On day 2 of the Forum, participants were asked to join structured and facilitated policy working groups that generated a list of policy recommendations presented back to attendees at the end of the Forum.

This report synthesizes the dialogue generated from the speaker panels and keynote presentations, as well as the recommendations generated by Forum participants. It also documents some of the areas where dissent was voiced or agreement could not be reached. The recommendations that emerged from the Forum have been presented within five domains: national drug policy reform; criminal justice reform; prevention, harm reduction, and treatment; research and knowledge exchange; and international leadership. Recommendations have been framed as opportunities to generate policy or amend existing policies in each of the five domain areas. For each recommendation, an appropriate timeline is identified.

Together with the work of other organizations leading a national conversation on drug policy, this report is intended for use by policymakers in all sectors and within all levels of government and civil society to prioritize action on drug policy in Canada over the coming ten years. In response to an unprecedented opioid crisis facing the country, more people are engaged in the drug policy arena than ever before. There is an imperative to explore and implement new and more effective policies in response to this ongoing crisis, as well as to reduce other adverse consequences of efforts to control the harms of drugs and drug use. This report presents a number of such recommendations to support the optimization of Canada's policy response in this domain.

Read the full report: <http://www.cdff-fadc.ca/summary-of-proceedings-and-final-recommendations>

Recommendations



1. National Drug Policy Reform

- 1a. Create a mechanism for stakeholders, including people who use drugs, to advise on the implementation of the *Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy*.
- 1b. Develop regulations for newly-legal substances (e.g., cannabis) in tandem with adjustments to regulations for other regulated substances (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, pharmaceuticals) to ensure harmonization of laws on marketing and promotion.
- 1c. Before enacting any supply-side restriction (e.g. removing an opioid analgesic from the market), conduct tests to predict its likely impacts on multiple dimensions of Canadian drug markets (e.g., regulated, pharmaceutical, grey, and illegal) and the health and safety of communities. This analysis should also consider the optimal sequencing for implementation of interventions.
- 1d. Commit a portion of tax revenues from sales of legal cannabis into programs that directly address the needs of communities most deeply impacted by drug criminalization.
- 1e. Establish a federal commission to: a) conduct a cost-benefit analysis of current drug control policies, b) explore potential steps toward decriminalization, legalization, and regulation of each class of currently illegal drugs, and c) consider formal acknowledgement and redress for harms of drug prohibition policies.



2. Criminal Justice Reform

- 2a. End the practice of requiring that individuals plead guilty to access diversion programs, and expand the range of offenses eligible for drug treatment courts and other diversion programs.
- 2b. Create prosecutorial guidelines instructing Crown Prosecutors not to pursue charges for personal possession and use of cannabis in the period prior to the full implementation of recreational cannabis regulation.
- 2c. Establish a system for persons with existing convictions for non-violent cannabis offences to apply for pardons.
- 2d. Implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (#30-32) related to sentencing for drug-related offenses.
- 2e. Repeal elements of the *Safe Streets and Communities Act* that evidence suggests have harmful public health and/or discriminatory effects (e.g., on people with problematic substance use, or on other grounds such as race or gender), such as mandatory minimum sentences and other restrictions on conditional sentences.
- 2f. Conduct a review of policing and police oversight practices related to drug law enforcement, in order to identify practices where adverse public health consequences outweigh public safety benefits, and propose alternative approaches.

Recommendations (cont.)



3. Prevention, Harm Reduction, and Treatment

- 3a. Implement and evaluate harm reduction-based drug checking services as a public health and consumer safety measure, to ensure a safe supply.
- 3b. Commit to providing and monitoring adequate coverage for evidence-based comprehensive treatment and harm reduction interventions, including opioid agonist therapy, needle and syringe programs, supervised consumption sites, naloxone, and distribution of safer consumption kits.
- 3c. Develop national and provincial child welfare policies that prioritize the long-term best interests of the child, in acknowledgement that substance use and/or poverty alone do not justify removal from otherwise loving parents.
- 3d. Develop harmonized national guidelines on best practices for supporting youth in transition out of foster care who are at heightened risk of substance use disorder.
- 3e. Develop national guidelines and infrastructure to improve access to injectable treatments in community settings (i.e., hydromorphone, diacetylmorphine [medical heroin]), and to opioid agonist therapy (OAT; e.g., methadone, buprenorphine, slow-release oral morphine).
- 3f. Develop comprehensive discharge plans for people released from jail or prison, including harm reduction strategies (e.g. overdose prevention) and, if indicated, substance use disorder treatment, with monitoring and follow-up.



4. Research and Knowledge Exchange

- 4a. Integrate the issue of stigma against people who use drugs into broader anti-discrimination strategies and in training on harm reduction, trauma-informed practice, and cultural safety for health, justice, and social systems.
- 4b. Improve the collection and analysis of criminal justice statistics related to drug law enforcement (e.g., arrests, incarceration), with disaggregation by race/ethnicity, Indigenous ancestry, and gender. Publish an annual report by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.
- 4c. Establish a national drug policy observatory mandated to a) conduct drug surveillance and analysis of multiple dimensions of drug policy (e.g., public health, legal and illegal markets, violence, crime) with an equity lens, b) publish annual reports and convene dissemination and knowledge exchange, and c) develop metrics for measuring progress in drug policy implementation.



5. International Leadership

- 5a. Explore options to reconcile domestic recreational cannabis regulation with the UN drug control treaties, including at the next session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the High Level Ministerial Meeting in 2019, and through discussions with member states, UN agencies, and other relevant stakeholders.
- 5b. Integrate evidence-based drug policies in foreign policy and development cooperation strategies, through the frameworks of Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality, human rights, and international security, and allocate commensurate resources toward their achievement.