

## QUICK FACTS: DRUG LAWS AROUND THE WORLD

Governments around the world use different legal approaches to drugs. Generally, the production and sale of drugs is either prohibited or legalized and regulated. A person found in possession of drugs can face criminal charges, non-criminal charges or no charge. The law may also require public health programs for treatment, prevention and harm reduction. Most countries use a combination of approaches depending on the drug. Some examples of different approaches to drugs are described below.

### Canada

- Alcohol is legal and regulated with rules for consumption, sale and production.
- Non-medical use of cannabis will be legalized and regulated in 2018. Authorized medical use of cannabis is legal.
- Other drugs such as heroin are illegal, and possessing/producing/selling them is a crime.
- The consumption of illegal drugs in federally-approved supervised consumption services (e.g. supervised injection sites) is not a crime.

### Portugal<sup>1,2</sup>

- Alcohol is legal and regulated with rules for consumption, sale and production.
- Other drugs such as cannabis or heroin are illegal, and producing and selling them is a crime.
- Possession of less than 10 days' supply of drugs for personal use is an administrative violation not a crime. If authorities find someone in possession of this amount twice in six-months they are referred to a "dissuasion commission" of health/social workers who decide whether to refer them to health services, impose an administrative sanction (e.g. fine), or take no further action.<sup>3</sup>

### Netherlands<sup>1,2</sup>

- Alcohol is legal and regulated with rules for consumption, sale and production.
- Other drugs such as heroin are illegal, and producing and selling them is a crime.
- Cannabis may be consumed and sold in licensed "coffee shops."
- People found with small amounts of illegal drugs are not charged with a criminal offence in many parts of the country.
- A person may use drugs in supervised consumption services (e.g. supervised injection site).
- People with substance use issues may be ordered to get treatment instead of a prison sentence.

### New Zealand<sup>1,2</sup>

- Alcohol is legal and regulated with rules for consumption, sale and production.
- The production and sale of "party drugs" (e.g. new psychoactive substances) is regulated, however, they have not yet been produced legally for sale.
- People found with small amounts of other drugs that are illegal (e.g. heroin) may be ordered to attend treatment.

### Costa Rica<sup>1,2</sup>

- Alcohol is legal and regulated with rules for consumption, sale and production.
- It is a crime to produce and sell illegal drugs such as cannabis, heroin or cocaine.
- The consumption and possession of illegal drugs is not a crime, but people may be fined for consuming illegal drugs in public.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Centre (July 2016). *Decriminalization of Narcotics*.
- <sup>2</sup> Canadian Public Health Association (2014). *A New Approach to Managing Illegal Psychoactive Substances in Canada*.
- <sup>3</sup> International Drug Policy Consortium (2015). *A Public Health Approach to Drug Use in Asia: Principles and practices for decriminalization*.

Toronto Public Health would like to thank the members of the Public Health Approach to Drug Policy Steering Committee for their assistance in developing this fact sheet.

April 2018