

QUICK FACTS: HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH DRUG LAWS

Research has shown there are significant health, social and economic harms from laws that criminalize people who consume certain drugs. In addition, some groups of people who use drugs experience more negative impacts from our drug laws than others. These include people who are poor and/or homeless, people with mental health and/or substance use issues, youth, children of parents imprisoned for drug crimes, Indigenous people, racialized groups, and women. ^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11}

Illness, injury and death

Health harms resulting from laws that prohibit the use and possession of certain drugs include:

- An increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases such as hepatitis and tuberculosis. ^{4, 12}
- Forcing people into high-risk behaviours such as drug use in unsafe or unsupervised places, sharing previously used supplies, rushing injections or taking their whole supply of drugs at once, because they fear police. ¹³
- Creating barriers to accessing needed prevention and harm reduction services, and increasing the risk of injury, disease, and other harms. ¹⁴
- People who are imprisoned for drug offences have also been found to: ^{2, 13}
 - ❖ start injecting drugs at a younger age
 - ❖ have higher rates of HIV infections
 - ❖ engage in high-risk behaviours such as needle sharing, and
 - ❖ are less likely to participate in methadone maintenance treatment.

Criminal charges and convictions

The use of the criminal justice system to try and address drug use, possession and distribution results in criminal convictions that can cause: ^{1, 15}

- Experiences of stigma and discrimination from friends, family, and the community (i.e. negative attitudes (prejudice) and behaviours (discrimination)) ¹⁶
- Difficulty finding housing
- Difficulty finding a job, and moving ahead with a career
- Travel restrictions, which can impact job opportunities
- Barriers to family reunification and immigration.

Illegal drug supply

- Our current approach to drugs has not reduced the supply of drugs. Despite the trillions of government dollars spent trying to enforce drug prohibition, the illegal drug market continues to grow and is estimated at between \$426 and \$652 billion (US) per year. ¹⁷
- The unregulated, illegal market has produced stronger, more harmful drugs for higher profits. The unknown content of drugs is causing overdoses and other harms, as seen in the current opioid crisis. ^{12, 14, 18, 19}

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