

About the Stop the Violence Coalition

Stop the Violence BC is a coalition of past and present members of law enforcement, politicians, legal experts, public health officials and academics from the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria and the University of Northern BC. Coalition members have come together to engage British Columbians in a discussion aimed at developing and implementing marijuana-related policies that improve public health and safety.



Our coalition members have been touring the province meeting with the public and policy makers to discuss alternatives to marijuana prohibition. The above is a poster from a recent event in Kelowna.

Stop the Violence BC seeks to broaden the public's understanding of the link between marijuana prohibition and gang violence. Guided by the best available scientific evidence, the coalition is calling for marijuana to be governed by a strict regulatory framework aimed at limiting use while also starving organized crime of the profits they currently reap as a result of marijuana prohibition. Ongoing gang violence and other organized crime concerns associated with the marijuana trade in BC must be addressed by getting to the roots of the gang violence. Political leaders have been largely silent on this urgent public health and safety issue. BC needs to be a leader in starting a conversation on marijuana regulation that will lead to action.

Call for Regulation and Taxation

In several places around the world, marijuana possession and use for personal purposes has been decriminalized. For instance, in the State of California, individuals caught in possession of up to one ounce of marijuana only receive a minor administrative infraction—the equivalent of a parking ticket. While this saves law enforcement resources, it still leaves an unregulated market to the benefit of organized crime. As a result, violence continues, no tax revenue is generated and no effective regulatory controls are put in place to

limit harms such as marijuana sale to minors. Rather, the only interest of the illegal market is profit, hence the easy availability of marijuana to young people under marijuana prohibition.

Stop the Violence BC is calling for a strict public health framework that will address the public and safety issues associated with the illegal marijuana trade. This framework could include prohibitions on advertisement and public promotion as well as age restrictions and restrictions on where marijuana could be sold and consumed. These regulatory tools have proven effective at reducing rates of tobacco use. Further, Stop the Violence BC is proposing taxing this regulated market, which could allow for proceeds from the marijuana market to be used for programs that benefit society.

Driving Discussion

Since Stop the Violence BC's launch in the fall of 2011, the coalition has hosted panel discussions in Vancouver and Kelowna, as well as public education and press events. In the lead up to the 2013 provincial election, Stop the Violence BC will continue to host panel discussions and provide opportunities for public education through additional reports online and on our website (stoptheviolencebc.org), and via Facebook (facebook.com/stoptheviolencebc), Twitter (twitter.com/stvbc), Youtube (youtube.com/stoptheviolencebc).

Public Opinion

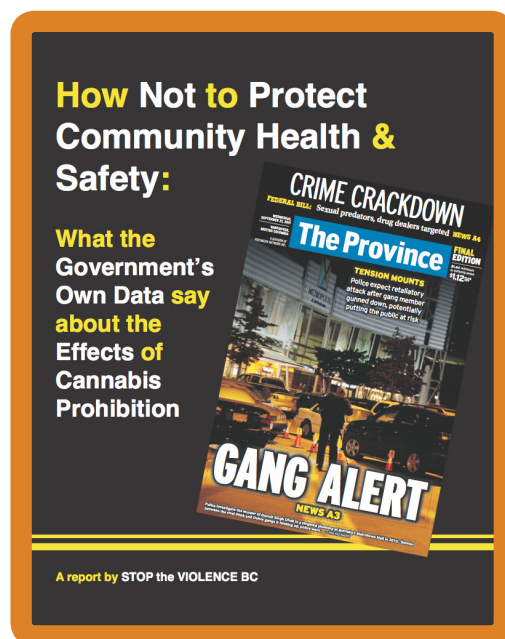
Polling conducted by Stop the Violence BC and Angus Reid in the fall of 2011 demonstrates support for policy change, with only 12% of British Columbians in favour of keeping existing marijuana laws unchanged. This follows polling conducted in 2009, which showed two-thirds of British Columbians supporting marijuana legalization. Not only that, but British Columbians see the link between organized crime and the marijuana trade. STVBC polling showed that over 60% of British Columbians, including over 70% of those who voted Conservative in the last federal election, said that there is a strong link between gang violence and organized crime's control of the marijuana trade. British Columbians recognize the failure of prohibition to keep their communities safe.

Reports

Breaking the Silence: Cannabis prohibition, organized crime and gang violence in BC, the first in a series from the Stop the Violence BC Coalition, outlines the links between marijuana prohibition in BC, the growth of organized crime and the expansion of related violence in the province. The report also defines the public health concept known as "regulation" and sets the stage for a much-needed public conversation around alternatives to marijuana prohibition.



John McKay, Former US Attorney who prosecuted Marc Emery, and Jodie Emery, Marc Emery's wife at a Stop the Violence BC press conference.



How not to protect community health and safety, the second report in a series from the STVBC Coalition.

How not to protect community health and safety: What the government's own data say about the effects of cannabis prohibition focuses on the impact of drug law enforcement on marijuana availability and the expansion of organized crime in BC. Using the government's own data, the report concludes that although increased funding for anti-marijuana law enforcement naturally leads to more marijuana-related arrests and seizures, research shows that these investments do not make marijuana less available or more costly to obtain.

For example, in the United States, the potency of marijuana has increased and marijuana has become more readily available over the past two decades. At the same time, the marijuana trade's unfettered growth in British Columbia has increased levels of violence, which are directly linked with the passive profits connected to the industry.

Public Support for Stop the Violence BC

Since the campaign's launch in the fall of 2011, Stop the Violence BC has received endorsements from many prominent individuals including:

Former Mayors of Vancouver Larry Campbell, Michael Harcourt, Philip Owen and Sam Sullivan in an open letter to the BC Provincial Government on October 27, 2011: "Marijuana prohibition is - without question - a failed policy. It is creating violent, gang-related crime in our communities and fear among our citizens, and adding financial costs for all levels of government at a time when we can least afford them. Politicians cannot ignore the status quo any longer, and must develop and deliver alternative marijuana policies that avoid the social and criminal harms that stem directly from cannabis prohibition."

Former BC Attorney General Geoff Plant, in an open letter to the BC Provincial Government on February 15, 2012: "It's time for our political leaders to accept and act on the overwhelming evidence linking marijuana prohibition to organized crime and gang violence. Punitive laws such as mandatory minimum sentences are clearly not the solution. Instead, taxation and regulation under a public health framework is the best way forward."



Major Neill Franklin, Executive Director, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition; Damon Barrett, Deputy Director, Harm Reduction International; and Dr. Evan Wood, Stop the Violence BC coalition member debate issues at a STVBC panel on November 10, 2011, moderated by Kathryn Gretsinger.

Former Canadian Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour, Virgin Group Founder Richard Branson, former Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Ruth Dreifuss, and Thorvald Stoltenberg, and the Global Commission on Drug Policy in an open letter to the Canadian Federal Government on February 29, 2012: "Canadians should take a third, evidence-based approach, which is advocated by the Global Commission and local and national organizations such as the Stop the Violence BC coalition. The Global Commission fully endorses the Stop the Violence BC coalition and its call to reduce corruption, organized crime and gang violence by taxing and regulating cannabis use under a public health framework."

Vernon Mayor Rob Sawatzky in an interview with the Vernon Morning Star on April 18, 2012: "Most well informed people who have studied the issue have determined prohibition is a failed policy...drinking is more open (because it's legal) and you can deal with alcoholics. It's difficult to deal with criminals."

Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan in an interview with *Burnaby Now* on April 27, 2012: "We saw the rise of Al Capone-like figures making their money off prohibition, and the same thing is happening with marijuana. People are making fortunes off of the distribution of marijuana illegally and in fact, we're not curing the problem at all, we're just pushing it underground. I think it's much better to take the attitude as we do with alcohol and cigarettes that while it is a vice, it's something that should be done in an upfront manner, the government should regulate and tax it and there should be controls placed on it."

Lake Country BC Mayor James Baker in an interview with Sun FM on April 27, 2012: "Drug addiction has decreased in those countries and they're not spending huge dollars on enforcement, they're regulating it and taxing it as a product to get some revenue instead of so much expenditures."

A partial listing of Stop the Violence Coalition members

Law enforcement and legal experts

John Anderson, PhD
Former Correctional Officer
Chair, Dept. of Criminology, VIU
Vice President, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (Canada)

David Bratzer
Police Officer
Board of Directors, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition

Vince Cain
Former Chief Coroner
Former RCMP Chief Superintendent

Ross Lander
Retired Justice, Supreme Court of British Columbia

Walter McKay
Former Police Officer
Consultant, WM Consulting
Founder/Director of International Affairs, Asociacion Mexicana de Reduccion de Riesgos y Danos

Academics

Neil Boyd, PhD
Professor and Associate Director, School of Criminology, SFU

Benedikt Fischer, PhD
Professor & CIHR/PHAC Applied Public Health Chair, Faculty of Health Sciences, SFU
Director, Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions

Thomas Kerr, PhD
Associate Professor, Dept. of Medicine, UBC
Director, Urban Health Research Initiative, BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

Josee Lavoie, PhD
Associate Professor, School of Health Sciences, UNBC
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Community Health Sciences, UManitoba Research Affiliate, Manitoba First Nations Centre for Aboriginal Health Research

Jean Shoveller, PhD
Professor & CIHR/PHAC Applied Public Health Chair, School of Population & Public Health, UBC
Senior Scholar, Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research

Health professionals

Jane Buxton, MBBS, MRCP, MSc, FRCPC
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John Carsley, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer

Paul Hasselback, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer
Clinical Associate Professor, School of Population and Public Health, UBC

Julio Montaner, MD, FRCPC, FCCP, FACP, FRSC
Director, BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS
Immediate Past President, International AIDS Society

Evan Wood, MD, PhD, ABIM, FRCPC
Professor, Dept. of Medicine, UBC
Director, Urban Health Research Initiative, BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

For a full list of coalition members, please visit: www.stoptheviolencebc.org/about-us

For a copy of the media release, poll data and to arrange interviews, contact:
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For more, please visit our website (stoptheviolencebc.org), Facebook (facebook.com/stoptheviolencebc), Twitter (twitter.com/stvbc), Youtube (youtube.com/stoptheviolencebc).