

B.C. political parties respond to call for support of legalized marijuana trial

Four major political parties differ on backing of research study despite poll demonstrating overwhelming public support in favour

Vancouver, BC [May 3, 2013] — Three of B.C.'s major political parties have responded to a questionnaire asking whether they would oppose a small-scale research trial to evaluate the taxation and regulation of adult cannabis use.

The questionnaire was issued by Stop the Violence BC (STVBC), a coalition of law enforcement officials, legal experts, public health officials and academic experts advocating for a research trial to investigate whether the taxation and strict regulation of adult marijuana use could reduce profits to organized crime and better prevent youth access to the drug.

When asked whether they would prevent a federally and ethically approved study of this nature, both the BC NDP and the Green Party of BC indicated their support of the evaluation, while the BC Liberals responded that a research trial would have to be initiated by the federal government and only then would they give the proposal "serious consideration." The BC Conservatives chose not respond to the questionnaire.

"It's encouraging to see leading political parties are open to investigating alternatives to cannabis prohibition," said Randie Long, a member of STVBC and former Federal Prosecutor. "As a federal prosecutor who has witnessed the ineffectiveness and serious harms resulting from the criminal justice approach to cannabis control, I believe politicians across jurisdictions should be actively searching for alternatives."

The questionnaire was sent to the parties on April 18 following the release of an Angus Reid poll showing that British Columbians overwhelmingly support the province undertaking a pilot study to evaluate the taxation and regulation of adult cannabis use. The survey, conducted between April 8 and 9, found that 73 per cent of British Columbians support a B.C. research trial conducted by local experts and health scientists.

"To suggest the federal government would have to initiate a research trial is a completely inaccurate statement," said Kash Heed, a longtime law enforcement official and former MLA for Vancouver-Fraserview in reference to the Liberal Party's response. "Some of our political leaders continue to bury their heads in the sand instead of taking decisive leadership. With all the grow ops and prohibition-related violence that is ongoing in B.C. communities, provincial politicians cannot continue to bury their heads in the sand and pass the buck to the federal government."

In response to applications from B.C. researchers, the federal government has recently provided research exemptions that allow British Columbian studies on the impacts of heroin prescription in the Downtown Eastside, as well as a trial of prescription MDMA (ecstasy) for post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Given the enormous costs and unintended consequences of cannabis prohibition, all political leaders should be endorsing carefully controlled assessments of alternative approaches," said Dr. Evan Wood, founder of STVBC and Canadian Research Chair in

Inner City Medicine at UBC. “For too long cannabis prohibition has endangered public health and safety by allowing organized criminals to control the industry. Especially now that Washington State has moved to tax and regulate adult cannabis use, B.C. must begin to research these types of alternatives.”

The proposed research trial is presently being designed, and initial proposals suggest it could operate with the objectives of improving community health and safety by: reducing unsafe and illegal grow ops through sanctioned cannabis producers, redirecting organized crime profits to fund addiction treatment and other underfunded health and social programs, and carefully assess for potential negative consequences for trial participants and the local community.

Read the responses from the provincial political parties at: <http://stoptheviolencebc.org/2013/05/03/b-c-political-parties-respond-to-call-for-support-of-legalized-marijuana-trial/>

For electronic copies of the following materials, visit stoptheviolencebc.org/election2013 or click on the links below:

- [Questionnaire](#)
- [Polling data](#)
- [FAQs](#)

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About Stop the Violence BC

Stop the Violence BC is a coalition of law enforcement officials, legal experts, public health officials and academic experts from the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, University of Victoria and the University of Northern BC. Coalition members have come together to engage all British Columbians in a discussion aimed at developing and implementing marijuana-related policies that improve public health while reducing social harms, including violent crime.

For a full listing of coalition members and to learn more about the coalition, please visit www.stoptheviolencebc.org

For more information about Stop the Violence BC or to interview a coalition member, please contact:

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