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NEWS INSIDERS

Vancouver, Health Canada to formally discuss drug decriminalization, mayor says

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FILE - Vancouver City Hall (Lasia Kretzel, NEWS 1130 Photo)

SUMMARY

Vancouver's mayor says Health Canada has agreed to begin formal talks on decriminalization of simple possession in city



If Vancouver is successful, it would become the first Canadian city to get approval to decriminalize simple possession



Vancouver mayor is hopeful decriminalization can help city amid overdose crisis



VANCOUVER (NEWS 1130) - Health Canada has agreed to start formal discussions with the City of Vancouver on its plan to decriminalize the simple possession of illicit drugs.

Mayor Kennedy Stewart says the federal minister of health confirmed the news Wednesday, calling this "another hopeful and critical milestone on the path towards fully embracing a health-focused approach to substance use" in Vancouver.

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Merika Gul



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City council unanimously approved in November a **motion to put the idea forward to the federal government** (<https://www.citynews1130.com/2020/11/18/vancouver-mayor-calls-decriminalize-drug-possession/>). If Vancouver is successful, it would become the first Canadian city to get this approval.

Stewart has been vocal about his push to have simple possession decriminalized, saying this move would go a long way to addressing the overdose crisis, which has gripped his city and British Columbia for years.

Related video: Vancouver unanimously approved motion to decriminalize possession of illicit drugs

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The mayor believes the issue needs to be treated with a health-focused approach rather than a criminal one.



News of Health Canada agreement to begin formal discussions “comes at a time when the overdose crisis in Vancouver is never been worse,” Stewart says in a statement.

“While 2020 looks to be the deadliest year on record for overdoses, I am hopeful that this news from Ottawa can mean that 2021 will be different,” he adds.

The city must go through the federal government to request a federal exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act if it is to decriminalize simple possession.

Stewart’s proposal has received the support of advocates from the Overdose Prevention Society, Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, Vancouver’s police chief, as well as the PIVOT Legal Society.

B.C. declared a public health emergency in the spring of 2016 due to the rising number of overdose deaths.

If successful, this would not be the first of firsts for Vancouver and Canada. The city became the first city in the country to get a Health Canada exemption to open up a supervised injection site in 2003.

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